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S H A K S P E A R E .

BY

H. N. HUDSON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THOMAS B. SMITH, STEREOTYPYER.

216 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y.

DEDICATION AND PREFACE.

TO MR. RICHARD H. DANA.

MY DEAR SIR :

The manner in which you have looked upon my labours encourages the thought, that the appearance of your name in this place, as it will be a comfortable sight to me, will not be unacceptable to you ; and if the sentiments that ought to prompt such an act are not here expressed, I not only know, but feel assured that you will know, it is not because they are not felt. Were the merit of these volumes as certain as the propriety of inscribing them to you is manifest, I might as well write my name here and stop : but I confess no little interest, that readers should not expect from me what I trust I am as far from pretending as from being able to give.

He who is always striving to utter himself, will of course be original enough : but he who wishes to teach, will first try to learn ; and as, to do this, he will have to study the same objects, so, unless his eye be a good deal better or a good deal worse than others, he will be apt to see, think, and say very much the same things as have been seen, thought, and said before. Wherefore, you will, I doubt not,

both credit my words and understand my meaning, when I assure you, that in writing these lectures, if I know my own mind, I have rather studied to avoid originality than to be original.

Aiming merely to produce a faithful commentary on the works of one who, unquestioned and unquestionable as is his excellence, is very apt, like virtue, to be praised and neglected, I have of course availed myself of all the aids and authorities within my reach ; often giving the thoughts of others just as I found them, oftener reproducing them in a form of my own ; and thus endeavouring, by all the means and resources at hand, to attain both justness of conception and clearness of expression. Often, when I have of my own accord arrived at conclusions wherein I afterwards found that others had anticipated me, I have chosen rather to fall back and stay myself on their authority than appear to stand alone ; because I know very well, that in a matter which has been so often and so ably handled, to be seen too much alone, is to be distrusted by all such whose confidence is worth having. I could with far more ease, and perhaps with more success, have thrown off any quantity of what are called “original views ;” for you cannot be ignorant how easy it is, with a small supply of matter and a great agitation of wit, to fill volumes with such things : but in that case my work would certainly have been no less worthless than easy and successful.—But at a time so rich in affectation of originality, when men seem unusually prone to think any thing wise which they can take to themselves the credit of discovering, and to fancy they are making

a just report of things while merely exposing their own obliquities and infirmities ;—at such a time no judicious person will need to be told why an author should make unoriginality a matter rather of boasting than of confession.

The lectures, as will be obvious to the slightest inspection of them, are not so properly on Shakspeare as on human nature, Shakspeare being the text. For the peculiar excellence of the poet's works is their unequalled ability to instruct us in the things about us, and to strengthen us for the duties that lie before us. If they went above or beside the just practical aims and interests of life, it would not be worth any man's while to study, much less, to interpret them. Literature, it can hardly be too often said, is good for nothing, nay worse than nothing, unless it be kept subordinate to something else: used as a means "to inform men in the best reason of living," it is certainly a very noble and dignified thing; but it loses all its depth and dignity when exalted, or rather degraded into an end. For, so to exalt it, is, truly, to degrade it. Whether the prevailing cant and affectation of literature be not an evidence that some such inversion has already taken place, is a question which I must content myself with merely asking. Those who are prepared to answer it in the affirmative, will not need to look any farther for the cause of that shallow, flashy, maudlin rhetoric which has been of late so plentifully spawned and so loudly puffed. As Shakspeare was the farthest of all men from this miserable idolatry of literature; so, if I have treated him with any sort of justice; if I have been at all under his

influence while writing upon him, I can hardly have failed to set him forth as the schoolmaster of a most liberal and practical wisdom, the high-priest of a most useful and manly discipline.

The tendencies and aptitudes of the time are so much more to science than to poetry, that works of art, if left to themselves, stand but a slender chance; since people, however intelligent, can hardly be interested in works where imagination has to give the initiative. When the analytic powers have thus eaten up the creative powers, and men have become too scientific to relish poetry, the result cannot well be other than disastrous: it is like Pharaoh's lean kine devouring the fat, yet growing none the fatter or fairer for all their good eating. Such a thing may be justly said to portend a moral and intellectual famine. But works of art are capable of a scientific as well as a poetic interest, else criticism were an absurdity; and if men are to develop or recover the faculties they want, it must be in the exercise of those they have: which explains my purpose in writing these lectures. Confident that if people could be drawn and held to works of art by a scientific interest, they would then come under influences, would silently and insensibly inherit pleasures and benefits which no mere science can impart, I have sought to induce and aid, not supersede, the study of Shakspeare; to awaken a practical human interest in his characters; to make my hearers or readers acquainted with his men and women: and, to this end, I have endeavoured to write in such a manner as should pre-suppose and at the same time further

a knowledge of the poet's works; that, in short, the hearer or reader should understand me the better for having studied him, and understand him the better for having studied me.

Somebody has said, that the best way to create an impression of originality nowadays, is to utter, as your own, things known and taught so long ago that they have passed out of remembrance; since in this way you will be sure to hit the native good sense of people while telling them things they are unused to hear. How this may be I cannot say: but if I succeed in adding the interest of novelty to any notions so old and true that they are in danger of being forgotten, I shall feel that the four years mostly spent on these lectures have not been thrown away. Respectfully dedicating the work, for better or for worse, to one whose consent with me has been among my strongest grounds for hoping that I might not have laboured altogether in vain, I am

Sincerely your friend,

H. N. HUDSON.

Boston, April, 1848.

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LECTURES ON SHAKSPEARE.

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LECTURE I.

ON SHAKSPEARE'S LIFE AND CHARACTER—HIS THEATRICAL LABOURS
—HIS POEMS AND SONNETS.

SHAKSPEARE, by general concession, is the greatest name in literature. Such various, and, at the same time, such exalted powers, probably never met together in the mind of any other human being. Whether we regard the kind or the degree of his faculties, he not only is, but is everywhere allowed to be, the prodigy of our race. Of the various excellencies of literary production, whether as a thinker or a speaker, in none has he a superior, in many he has no equal, in some he has scarcely even a competitor. He is emphatically the eye, tongue, heart of humanity, and has given voice and utterance to whatever we are and whatever we see. On all scores, indeed, he is the finest piece of work human nature has yet achieved; in the whole catalogue of uninspired men there is no other name that could not better be spared.

It is of the works of this great master of human thought and speech that I am about attempting to discourse. It is due to myself, however, to say in the outset, that censure and gratuitous praise are alike foreign

from my design : for an attempt at the former would but tend to sink me ; an attempt at the latter would but tend to sink him ; or rather, he is equally above them both ; no eulogy can possibly elevate, no criticism can possibly depress him : alone and unapproachable, on the summit of fame, he may justly scorn the former and defy the latter. The only bar to his universal and indisputable supremacy, is ignorance of his works, or insensibility to their manifold mighty attractions ; for against stupidity, as hath often been said, the gods themselves are powerless. It is to encourage the study, and aid the understanding of his works, that these lectures are undertaken. That such, however, will be the result of their influence, if, indeed, they should have any influence, I have certainly much more reason to hope than to expect. Nevertheless, I know of no better service which I can render my noble countrymen and fair countrywomen, than by trying to interest them in the works of one who, I think, has given me more pleasure and more profit than all my other studies put together.

But before I enter upon the subject, it seems necessary that I should say something of the man himself ; of the life he led, the work he did, the feelings he had, and the character he bore as a friend, a citizen, and a man. WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE, as is generally known, was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1564 ; under what particular star is not known ; probably, however, under all of them. His parents properly belonged to the English gentry ; were of respectable name and competent fortune. Of his personal history, as was to have been expected, but little is known. His work, indeed, was of too high an order to make much noise in the world, and therefore

his life afforded but little of the stuff out of which histories and biographies are usually made. The empire, too, of which he was sovereign, of course has no historian but himself, and of his exploits and conquests, his works are at once the substance and the chronicle. That the boy, William, however, went through the usual process of crying, and fretting, and pouting, of being fondled, and flattered, and flogged; there can be little doubt. That the sun, and stars, and silent sky shed in their soft, sweet influences upon his childhood, is quite probable; for similar things, we know, happen to most of us, though not, indeed, with similar results. But how, under the watchful eye of a mother's love, the Genius of Poesy, unseen and unsuspected, should have rocked his cradle and mingled in his childish sports; how nature, unperceived and unthought of, should have played so much with the heart of her child, and peopled his mind with the rudiments of so many graces and glories—this, truly, seems wonderful enough; nevertheless, it must be believed. Moreover, it is well enough known, that at the proper age he was sent to the Stratford free school, where he probably continued seven or eight years, when, his father's fortune giving way, he was taken home to aid in supporting the family.

Of what Shakspeare studied during this period, we know little; of what he thought and felt, still less. No wonders are related of the boy which were found, long afterwards, to foreshadow the greatness of the man. We read neither of his climbing trees, like Schiller, to see where the lightning came from, nor of his running away from school, like Barrow, to escape from study. He probably found time for all the sports and exercises

of his schoolmates, and for a thousand other things of which they never dreamed. How

“The whining school-boy, with his satchel,
And shining morning face, crept, like a snail,
Unwillingly to school;”

how the little urchin bore himself among his fellow-urchins, whether as their laughing brother or their democratic chief; how, the merriest of the merry and the gayest of the gay, he was wont to set the mischievous group in a roar, now by his mock gravity, now by his side-shaking fun; how he aroused the anger of his teacher by a trick, and then allayed it by another trick, and anon forced him to hide a real laugh under an affected frown; how spontaneous mirth and instinctive grace, heaven-eyed genius and human-eyed gentleness, meeting and kissing each other in his sunny face, stole him the hearts of his comrades, when his young blood was leaping, his young heart bounding, and his young soul bursting with light, and life, and joy;—of all or any of these things history doth not inform us. Meanwhile, however, the boy grew both inwardly and outwardly; how much he grew outwardly was apparent to those about him; how much he must have grown inwardly is, or at least ought to be, apparent to us.

It was during this period, no doubt, that Shakspeare acquired the “small Latin and less Greek,” which Ben Jonson long afterwards accorded to him, and which, though small at that time, and in the eye of so profound and voluminous a scholar as Jonson, would probably cause such a lad in our time to be esteemed a prodigy. For the present, then, as fortune, out of her bounty, to

us, perhaps, if not to him, would have it, the youth was to be kept at home, working with his hands, seeing with his eyes, and thinking with his mind. Meanwhile, what messages came to him from worlds not lighted by the sun; how nature kept working at his heart, informing and unfolding the seeds which she had planted there, and how meaning after meaning burst upon him as he scanned, one after another, the pages of that infinite mysterious volume whose author and writer is God,—of all this, also, history gives us no information whatever.

What sources of instruction lay open to Shakspeare during his stay at home, has been a subject of various conjecture. Of classical literature he could read but little; of English literature there was then but little to read. But, that at least one source of instruction lay open to him, is quite certain; whether he had, or whether he needed any other, may be a matter of doubt. The language which it most concerned him to know, had then, as always, but few teachers, and not many learners; and of this language he wanted no interpreter; for, as hath been said, “he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature with; he looked inwards, and found her there.” He had, therefore, the same teacher that genius always has; the power of learning from which, is, indeed, the very thing that constitutes genius. So far as mankind were concerned, his mission was to teach, not to be taught. As an evidence and earnest of his mission, he had a seeing eye; and this, without let or hindrance, admitted him at once into the grand high school, of which all other good schools, even the best, are but feeble and imperfect imitations. Himself the high-priest of nature, he needed no master of arts to

officiate for him, or to take the things that belonged to truth and show them unto him.

What branch of labor employed Shakspeare's hands while staying at home, has not been fully settled. What began, however, about this time, to employ his heart, is well enough known. Within the world of which he had already been a resident for about eighteen years, a new world was suddenly opened upon him. Hitherto the objects around him had probably had little or no interest for him unborrowed from the eye; they now began to have an interest borrowed from the heart. In a word, his soul was touched to nature's finest issue; and the springs of love, unsealed within him, were shedding an undreamed-of loveliness on every thing about him. One Anne Hathaway, dancing across his path, had unwittingly wrought all this mischief upon him. To the wild buoyancy of youthful imagination, were now added the wild transports of youthful passion; and he, against whose presence the strongest of female hearts are said to have been powerless, became the captive of a lady eight years older than himself. To this lady, the daughter of a substantial Warwickshire yeoman, Shakspeare was married at the age of eighteen.

How the prospect of wedded bliss must have appeared to a spirit like his,—a spirit framed of so much light, and love, and happiness, few, indeed, can guess. Hitherto his life, though not unvisited by misfortune, had doubtless been a joyous one. The social and fireside influences, by which he was surrounded, we have reason to believe were altogether healthful and pure. From the vicious habits and vicious courses, into which young men are so apt to fall, he seems to have been remarkably

free ; though we can hardly doubt, that with so much of heaven there must have been mingled somewhat of earth. If we may credit Ben Jonson, his most intimate friend, and one of the purest men of the age, his character as a man was itself an exemplification of the beauties which blossomed out so divinely in his works :—

“ Look how the father's face
Lives in his issue : even so the race
Of Shakspeare's mind and manners brightly shines,
In his well turned and true filed lines.”

From all, indeed, that is known of his subsequent life and character, we must clear him from any charge of youthful dissoluteness. The virtues of the man seem to have been fit companions for the gifts of the poet. And, indeed, such exquisite harmony and proportion of faculties, all playing into and tempering each other ; an intellect of such sure-sighted, far-seeing vision ; a heart so clean of vicious propensities, so full of inborn grace and chastity ; and an imagination so pregnant with all pure and lovely forms, might well have fortified him against far more corrupting influences than those about him. And, on the other hand, in an age and nation which could both produce and appreciate such spirits as Spenser, and Raleigh, and Sidney ; an age uniting the utmost vigor of passion with the utmost chastity of principle ; pervaded with the keenest sensibility of honor and the profoundest loyalty to sex ; when purity formed the shrine where chivalry knelt, and love itself became a religion, the soul of which was “ awe of womanhood ;”—surely, in such an age and nation, a mind of far less inward strength and rectitude than Shakspeare's, could

hardly have failed to have walked unscathed and unharmed. I have made these remarks in order to rescue, if possible, the name of Shakspeare from the sacrilegious hands of a set of commonplace moralists, who, delighting to scent out and feed upon the ulcers of genius, so often verify the adage, "death loves a shining mark," and remind us of Virgil's

"Diræ obscenæque volucres ;
Turba sonans predam pedibus circumvolat uncis ;
Polluit ore dapes."

But though no stain appears on the private character of either Shakspeare or his matron bride, the union did not prove a fortunate one. We can hardly say, indeed,

" All heaven
And happy constellations on *the match*
Shed their selectest influence."

No charge has ever been breathed against the lady ; but her being left at Stratford by her husband during his long residence in London, is evidence that a decided, though peaceful, and perhaps mutual estrangement, had taken place between them. Though purely a love match, it does not appear to have been made in heaven, and perhaps the subsequent indifference was rather the misfortune of both than the fault of either. Himself eight years her junior, Shakspeare may have been at once too old to be her subject, and too young to be her lord.

While conjugal estrangement was thus loosening the ties that bound him to Stratford, youthful mischievousness was preparing an occasion for his departure to the metropolis. There was a class of men in England then, as now, whom nature had specially gifted and

commissioned to preserve their game. Of this class was one Sir Thomas Lucy, a Warwickshire esquire, who had on his manor some deer. We have no evidence that Shakspeare was given to poaching; but there was probably something so inexpressibly ludicrous in this noble knight's game-preserving morality, as to provoke a spirit of mischievous adventure in a mind so redundant of life and mirth as Shakspeare's. In an excursion of this sort upon his knightship's grounds, fortunately for all but the knight and himself, Shakspeare was caught in a supposed attempt at stealing deer; which supposed attempt so much exasperated this powerful and pious preserver of his game, as to render Shakspeare's longer stay at Stratford out of the question. I probably need not say that this Warwickshire esquire, once so rich and mighty, is now known only as the block over which the Warwickshire peasant stumbled into immortality. And this so trifling adventure of boyish fun, which has so often been seized upon "to point a moral or adorn a tale," by the hungry hunters after great men's sins, who, if they could not find better illustrations in their own history, ought, surely, to have been flogged for dulness;—this so trifling youthful frolic, I say, was altogether insignificant, save as it was pregnant with the fate of English literature.

To escape, it is said, the angry clutches of Sir Thomas, Shakspeare, at the age of about twenty-three, set out for the metropolis. Of the circumstances of this flight, so ominous for him, so auspicious for us, we know nothing whatever. For a homeless, and friendless, and pennyless youth, like Shakspeare, thus to cast himself into such a howling wilderness of people as London,

outwardly it is one of the most desperate adventures in literary history. What could he do there? what could he expect or even hope for? But,

“There was a divinity that shaped his ends,
Rough hew them how he would.”

Insuperable as his outward difficulties appear to us, this strongest, and therefore stillest of mortals, seems to have conquered them almost without knowing it. That his keenly-susceptible spirit dropped some natural tears on leaving his native Stratford, and tearing himself away from the objects to which his feelings had earliest grown, cannot indeed be doubted; but it was from sweet, though sad remembrances, not from gloomy forebodings, that they sprung. “Sufficiently provided for within, he had need of little from without.” Free from inward distractions and misgivings, from remorse and self-reproach, and animated with the divine presentiment which it is the prerogative of genius to feel, “his lightly-moved and all-conceiving spirit” stepped forth, rejoicing like the sun to run his course, carrying light in his countenance, and scattering day from his footsteps; and all outward difficulties fled from the glance of him who had no difficulties within. Nay, of the mountains which seem so impassable to us, he is probably made aware, if at all, only by the greatness of view to which they raise him; in the fulness and spontaneousness of his powers, he ascends them so calmly, and smoothly, and easily, that the growing beauty and vastness of the prospect seem coming to him, instead of his toiling and struggling up to them.

From the first, nature had evidently designed and fit-

ted Shakspeare to be a sort of mediator between herself and her children ; to bring her down to us, and raise us up to her. To this end, knowing best what to do with her own, she had kept him in her eye ; to this end, his feelings and faculties had thriven amid her bounties and amenities, until he should become thoroughly formed and furnished for the work. But how should he ascertain in what form and language he could best discharge the task assigned him ? “ Even in this was heaven ordinant.” It was the custom of the London players at that time, to make occasional excursions into the country villages. Stratford, being fond of theatrical representations, of course became one of their favourite resorts, and was thus visited by stage performances at a time when Shakspeare was of an age not only to enjoy them, but also to make some acquaintance with the performers. In a mind so replete with dramatic power, the sight of these exhibitions, rude as they were, could hardly have failed to awaken a corresponding inclination. Of these players, moreover, three of the most distinguished, Thomas Greene, John Heminge, and Richard Burbage, were natives of Stratford or its vicinity, and probably well known to Shakspeare before they entered the theatre. On arriving at the metropolis, therefore, he had no resource but to seek out his old acquaintances, and ask for admission into their company. For him, genius, inclination, and opportunity, had now met together ; and, though doubtless admitted at first to some very humble station, he soon rose to respectability, as an actor, and to distinction as a writer of plays. His connection with the stage, either as actor, or proprietor, or both, continued about twenty years. His share in

the concern gave him an easy competence, while his talents and character as a man, gave him honourable access to the best social advantages which that splendid bursting-forth of individual and national genius could afford. The circles of wit, of wealth, and of blood were open to him. Personally treading the elevations of society, and intellectually soaring in the highest heaven of invention, he was at once the playmate of nature, the companion of sages, and the admired of princes; while the wisest, the wittiest, and the noblest of his age and nation, had the honour of appreciating his genius, and of smiling upon his labours. At or near the age of forty-seven, with a handsome fortune, and in the zenith of his faculties, he retired from his profession to his native Stratford, where he passed the remainder of his too short life, and died in 1616, aged 52.

Of Shakspeare's morals and manners during his residence in London, the few accounts which we have unite in giving the most favourable impression. The blamelessness of his life, the gentleness of his disposition, and the sweetness of his manners, form a theme over which friendship has poured the consecration of some of its tenderest and sacredest memorials. His modesty, and courtesy, and integrity of demeanour, seem to have kept pace with his greatness of intellect; the former to have been as successful in winning affection, as the latter in winning admiration. Instances are on record of his generosity towards the productions even of rivals, which do equal honour to his head and his heart. Himself at once most loving and most worthy to be loved; severe to his own faults, and kind to the faults of others; blind to his own merits, and quick-

sighted to the merits of others ; it is no wonder that the envy, which his transcendent genius would naturally have provoked, gave place to the love which his gentle and generous spirit inspired. With a form and countenance moulded by the very genius of manly beauty ; with the smiles of intellectual grace gushing through his features and manners ; with the fascinations of wit and poetry dancing in his eyes and dropping from his tongue ; in a word, himself

“ A combination, and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man ;”

it is far from strange that woman, weaponless against his manifold attractions of mind and person,

“ To hear him speak, and see him smile,
She felt in paradise the while,
And eye, and ear, and every thought
Were with the sweet perfections caught.”

In his twenty-eighth year, while yet almost a stranger in London, a rival contemporary assures us, that “divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, which approves his art.” The integrity, indeed, of his life, and the blandness and benignity of his deportment, are spoken of by his dramatic competitors as almost proverbial. Jonson, his constant rival for the dramatic palm, says of him, with noble simplicity, after his death, “I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, of an open and free nature ; had an excellent

fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions." Besides, the patronage of the generous, the high-souled, chivalrous Earl of Southampton, and the deep, lasting friendship that accompanied it, are of themselves proof, that Shakspeare had as much to invite affection as to engage respect; and that his head and heart "strove which should express him goodliest." And the playful tenderness of the titles, "My gentle Shakspeāre," and the "Sweet swan of Avon," by which he was generally known, show how deeply the sweetness of his disposition had sunk into the hearts of those who best knew him, and what a rich gushing tide of human-heartedness nature had poured along the life-channels of his being. Assuredly, if there be any one thing which, more than all others, ought to endear to us the gentle, the judicious, and the thousand-souled Shakspeare, as Jonson, Hooker, and Coleridge, have successively and most appropriately called him, it is the fact, that as he was the wisest and wittiest, so he was also one of the noblest and gentlest of men.

THEATRICAL LABOURS.

OF Shakspeare's labours during his connection with the stage, we have no record except his works. That he was keenly and habitually industrious, is evident from the fruits, and was, indeed, an almost inevitable result of his sleepless activity of mind. The frequent occurrence of his name on the programmes of theatrical representations shows the extent of his histrionic labors; while his cares and duties as assistant manager and proprietor could have been neither few nor small.

Uniting, indeed, the offices of actor, manager, and writer, his labors must necessarily have been both constant and severe; and this twenty years, so dark and blank to us, was doubtless alive with the most intense and varied exertion. His quick, sure discernment, his ready infallible tact, his boundless fertility of expedients, and his irresistible grace of manners would naturally make him the soul of the establishment; and the turbulent, chaotic elements, of which it was composed, could hardly choose but wait for the call of his creative voice to bring them into harmony and order. It is well known, moreover, that at the time of his entering on the boards, the profession of actor was in exceedingly ill repute. To separate the vocation of player from the practice of rowdyism or scoundrelism, into which it is so apt to run, and to raise it up to respectability, or even decency, would seem a hard enough task at any time; at that time it could hardly have failed to require the utmost efforts even of his commanding genius; and the moderate respectability, to which it rose during his connection with the stage, was doubtless owing in a great measure to the efficiency of his exertions, the influence of his example, and the power of his name. Besides, the accuracy and extensiveness of information displayed in his works, prove him to have been, for that age, a profound and voluminous reader of books. Portions of classical and of continental literature were accessible to him in translations, if not in the originals. Chaucer, too, "the day-star," and Spenser, "the sunrise," of English poetry, the former two centuries, the latter a few years before, had poured forth their rich treasures of melodious wisdom

into the broad, deep bosom of the national mind. From all these and from the growing richness and abundance of contemporary literature, Shakspeare's all-gifted and all-grasping mind of course greedily devoured and speedily digested whatever could please his taste, or enrich his intellect, or assist his art.

It will very much aid us in appreciating both the art and the industry of Shakspeare, to contemplate, for a few moments, his precise relation to the English drama. Public theatres were first licenced in England by Elizabeth, "as well for the recreation of our loving subjects as for our own solace and pleasure," in 1574, the tenth year of Shakspeare's age. Previously, however, a taste for theatrical amusements had been excited by companies of strolling players, who, under the title of rogues and vagabonds, were silenced by act of government in 1572. The enthusiasm for play-going being intense, the legal establishment of public theatres of course afforded a crisis for the bursting forth of dramatic genius, and, as it unfortunately proved, for its ruin. A wild tornado of "fiery emanations," restless and reckless, rushed into the metropolis, to supply the already famishing and clamorous market. This fierce insurrection of artless and unprincipled genius, as if embarked in a desperate adventure for chaos and hell; goaded on by need, and greed, and vainglory; writing for the day without expecting; or perhaps even wishing to survive it; poured forth their clap-traps for the groundlings, and soon deluged the stage with lawless and shapeless effusions, "lewd enough to corrupt a saint, and profane enough to shame the devil."

Jonson, severe, indeed, and somewhat morose as a

critic, but a nobly-gifted and pure-minded man, speaking of these writers, says, that "not only their manners, but their natures were inverted;" that "nothing remained with them of the dignity of poet, but the abused name;" and that "especially in dramatic, or, as they termed it, stage poetry, nothing but ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all license of offence both to God and man," were practised. Again he characterizes their productions as "miscelline interludes, wherein nothing was uttered but the filth of the time; and with such impropriety of phrase, such plenty of solecisms, such dearth of sense, so bold prolepses, so racked metaphors, with brothelry able to corrupt the ear of a pagan, and blasphemy to turn the blood of a Christian to water." This fierce, scorching eloquence of noble old Ben, is doubtless somewhat extravagant; but the truth is, his feelings had been stretched on the rack by their triumphant licentiousness; and if it seem strange that virtue should have charged his heavy artillery with such loads of fiery indignation, we should recollect that she had been outraged and exasperated by no less a crime than the desecration of art and the prostitution of genius. That he waxed furious at seeing genius thus developed only to be destroyed, and, like funeral torches, at once consuming itself and lighting others to death, is creditable alike to his mind and his morals.

That this loathsome accumulation of rubbish and offal was altogether without redeeming elements, is not to be supposed. The monstrous brood of a race of Titans, these productions betrayed at least a giant strength, far preferable indeed of itself to the creeping effeminacy, the frozen rhetoric, and the apish etiquette of a

much later age. Though the offspring of genius run mad, they were, nevertheless, the offspring of genius ; and the divinity that always stirs within genius was sure sometimes to speak out through them. Sparks of celestial fire dwelt in them, but so buried beneath cart-loads of ashes and dirt, as to be hopelessly hidden from the general eye. Writers pandering to the passions of the multitude for bread or for noise, and trusting to the inexhaustible abundance of their stores, stopped not to assail the finer elements of the baser alloy that encumbered them. In short, the English stage presented but a prodigious overgrowth of loathsome and poisonous weeds, whose rankness served but to approve the richness and raciness of the soil ; and the gifted eye had not yet come, which was to detect and rescue those numerous herbs of heavenly virtues that redeemed the crop from utter worthlessness. That originality pervaded, or rather, constituted, the entire growth, probably need not be said ; but it was originality divorced from excellence ; without art, or order, or law. Nay, they were obliged to be original, for it is not in the nature of the human mind long to preserve prototypes for such monstrous creations ; so that if their like ever existed before, they could not possibly have outlived the time that produced them. Genius, unwilling to be instructed by classical models, yet unable to attain excellence without such instruction ; genius struggling through manifold and manifest obstructions of ignorance and depravity ; genius huddling together a few scenes, peopled with strong but crude conceptions, and filled with low, grovelling humour, and truculent, stormful bombast, mixed with occasional bursts of the noblest

poetry, and winding up in pell-mell confusion, gave to a clapping and shouting mob-audience a chaos utterly incapable of a catastrophe.

Such, substantially, appears to have been the condition of the English stage, when Shakspeare entered the theatre. It was out of this dark, pestiferous, and lethiferous imbroglio of earth and heaven, of dirt and divinity, that the myriad-minded genius of England was to create the bright, breathing, blossoming world of a national drama, the finest and noblest ever seen. At the time of which I am speaking, it was customary for the playwrights, acting separately or conjointly, to get up rifacimientos of these old plays. In this way, neglected stock-copies, as they were called, after having been justly consigned to oblivion, were drawn out from the obscurity of the theatrical wardrobe, and came under the soft pencillings or sharp prunings of some of the greatest names on the roll of English literature. Let us imagine Shakspeare, utterly unconscious of his yet slumbering powers, and merely pursuing his managerial duties or interests, bending over the dusty manuscript of one of these wretched performances. Under the impulse of his first creative transport, seizing the pen, he hurries whole scenes into deepest night, and proceeds to replace them with his own intense, burning conceptions. Under his pencil, pregnant with celestial hues, the canvas of the fable before him, cleared of its wretched daubs, becomes almost divine; and the genius of poesy, hovering round his movements,

“ Adds the gleam,
The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet’s dream.”

That happy hour was the obscure birth of his immortality. Without any throes of labour, or flutterings of vanity, or congratulations of friends, he meekly and quietly ushered into being the first fruits of his genius. Hitherto English literature had no Shakspeare, and was poor ; henceforth it has a Shakspeare, and is unspeakably rich.

Had not Shakspeare's creative faculties been thus induced to brood over this chaotic heap of materials, until the mass became alive with the divinity issuing from him, his powers might have remained unknown both to himself and to the world. Engrossed in his theatrical labours, regardless of fame, and ignorant of his powers, he probably had little time, and less inclination, and no encouragement, to engage in the inventing of fables and the constructing of plots. Without the artist's hope, he was therefore without the artist's ambition ; and probably had not presumed or suspected there was virtue enough in his pencil to pay the weaving of the canvas. To my mind, there is nothing in Shakspeare's character more admirable than that, without any of the modern cant about the artist's mission, as if this ought to exempt him from the ordinary cares and concerns of life ; never mistaking the suggestions of vanity for the inspirations of genius, nor fancying himself honored by Heaven with any extraordinary messages to mankind, nor fearing lest he should fall below the work whereunto he was sent ;—thus nursing pride under an affectation of duty, and pleading conscience in behalf of conceit, and seeking, or sneaking, for some sphere commensurate with his great gifts ;—but acting as if on purpose to exemplify, that “wisdom is oftentimes nearer

when we stoop than when we soar," he should have poured forth all the glory of his genius in striving simply to gain an honest and an honorable livelihood. How many of those foul, misshapen, monstrous forms he drew forth from their dark prison-house, and moulded into the beauty, and animated with the breath of his genius, cannot be ascertained. Traces of his inimitable hand are perceptible in many plays published under the names of contemporary dramatists; several of those published in his own name, are known to have been regenerations of pre-existing stock-copies; and some which drew vitality from his embraces perished in the subsequent wreck of theatrical wealth. At the glance of his mind, the ready-made scene became the very sphere of humanity; and all the persons of the drama, together with their appropriate surroundings, came trotting from his imagination, seemingly of their own accord, and as if by the express ordering of nature herself. Viewing an old fable or play with the prophetic eye of genius, he at once saw all that it had, and all that it wanted; measured its utmost capabilities, and supplied its utmost demands. Not venturing, perhaps, to undertake the drudgery, he almost unconsciously achieved the divinity, of his art. With the skeleton of a drama before him, which another could furnish as well, he could clothe it with flesh and inform it with life, which none could furnish but himself. Its characterless personages he could endow with individuality; its wooden faces he could transfigure into faces of flesh and blood, bursting with expression and life; its sleepy dialogue he could electrify with passion, and melt its frozen numbers into liquid music: scarifying its tumidities, and clip-

ping its excrescences, and moulding its disjointed members into an organic whole; now kindling a hidden spark into a blaze of splendour, now expanding an obscure bud into a glorious blossom, now letting in a flood of overpowering humour, or a gush of overpowering pathos, as the character or the occasion required;—he could endow it at once with all the truth of nature and all the beauty of art.

Meanwhile, there arose two parties among the playwrights, one thinking to revive the Classic drama, another to create what has since been called the Gothic, or Romantic drama. At the head of the former party was Jonson, who, though ten years younger than Shakspeare, begun his career as a writer about the same time. Being a profound student and ardent admirer of the ancients, this great man very naturally regarded the classic models as the only form compatible with dramatic excellence. His masculine judgment, instead of being the joint-workman of his creative faculties, became their king, if not indeed their tyrant. His vast learning, instead of cheerfully serving, gave law to his powerful genius; whereas genius finds its true perfection in being a law unto itself. His dramas, carefully yet freely moulded on the classic models, are doubtless among the best specimens we have in their kind; for the soul of poetry, which dwelt in him, was bound to shine through whatever form he chose to embody it in. In the noble dedication of one of his noblest performances, he says, “I have herein laboured to restore, not only the ancient forms, but manners of the scene, the easiness, the propriety, the innocence, and last, the doctrine, which is the principal end of poesy, to inform men

in the best reason of living." Again, speaking of his future labors, in that noble consciousness of integrity and power, which it was not then so fashionable as now, to cloak under an affected modesty, he says: "If my muses be true to me, I shall raise the despised head of poetry again, and, stripping her out of the rotten and base rags, wherewith the times have adulterated her form, restore her to her primitive habit, feature, and majesty, and render her worthy to be embraced and kissed of all the great and master-spirits of the world."

Honest old Ben was as good as his word: but the spirit of the age was too strong for him; nay, the spirit within him seems often to have quarrelled with the form in which he sought to embody it; thus showing that his nature was wiser than his art. Great and unquestionable as were his merits, it was impossible for him to succeed. His plays, abundantly interesting, indeed, to scholars, failed to reflect the mind and heart of the age, and therefore could not interest the people. The genius of modern culture could not see its face in the mirror of ancient art; it could not accept

"Such musty fopperies of antiquity,
Which did not suit the humorous age's back
With clothes in fashion."

The classic drama, with all its surpassing beauty, could but entomb the spirit of the past;—a spirit which had long since passed out of actual life, and survived only in the immortality of ancient art; while the demand was, for a drama living and breathing with the spirit of the present. The truth is, the human mind had awak-

ened to another and a higher life. Passing into a more glorious form, it must of course put on more glorious apparel. Having graduated out of the crysalis state, it could not adjust itself to its former habitation. In short, the genius of the age could not exist in a classic form, and would not be recognized there if it should; and therefore had to originate and shape a new form of its own. The creation of this new form was the problem for the dramatist to solve, when Jonson wrote. Striving to satisfy the law of ancient art, he of course failed to satisfy the law of modern thought. Seeking to restore the classic forms, he went out of the age instead of representing it; and therefore, even if he became superior to it, he was rather separated from it by that superiority, than brought thereby into closer union and sympathy with it. While, therefore, Jonson's antagonists, working only in the dross of the present, attained originality without excellence, Jonson himself, working in the pure metal of the past, attained excellence without originality. I probably need not say, that it was reserved for Shakspeare, himself the "soul of the age," as Jonson magnificently calls him, to unite them both in the highest degree. His marvellous intellect, dowered with all the faculties, yet assoiled from all the encumbrances of his time, found no obstacle between itself and nature. Ignorant of the classic models, and pre-occupied with no former choice, his virgin genius gave itself up, with the entireness of a first love, to its appropriate bride; and perfect beauty and perfect originality met together in the offspring.

It was Shakspeare's prerogative, then, to create models, not to follow them. Himself alone is his own pro-

tototype. Uniting the insight to discern, the comprehension to grasp, and the art to embody the spirit which gave life to the age, he became the father of the Gothic or Romantic drama, which bears much the same relation to modern culture, as the Classic drama bore to ancient culture. For though, in the words of Jonson, "he was not of one age, but for all time," he nevertheless includes the age in which he lived, as the greater includes the less. While, therefore, he discloses the innermost fibres of our universal humanity, he at the same time gives us the leaves and blossoms with which it then and there attired itself; so that the genius of modern culture looks out upon us, deep, earnest, and full of meaning from his works. Well might the distinguished Hurd exclaim, "This astonishing man is the most original thinker and speaker since the days of Homer!"

POEMS.

IN his twenty-ninth year, while employing his leisure, as I have already said, on the stock-plays of the theatre, Shakspeare gave to the world his *Venus and Adonis*, dedicated, in a strain of inimitable modesty and courtesy, to his noble friend and patron, the Earl of Southampton. In the dedication, he calls this poem "the first heir of his invention," and vows "to take advantage of all idle hours, till he can honour his lordship with some graver labour." Encouraged by the earl's generosity, and warmed by his friendship, he accordingly published, the following year, his *Tarquin and Lucrece*, dedicated to the same noble person in a tone of less

disguised affection, assuring him, that "the love he bore his lordship was without end ; that what he had done was his, and what he had to do was his." It was probably Southampton's munificence, in part, during this period, that enabled Shakspeare to become joint proprietor of the establishment in which he had hitherto been but an actor. From his calling Venus and Adonis the first heir of his invention, it seems likely he had written it several years before, but had hitherto withheld it from publication.

Of these two poems, which were but as the morning star, sent forth to herald the coming of his genius, it will not be inappropriate to make a few remarks. Their worth, indeed, has been altogether eclipsed by his subsequent performances ; but it may be said, that the greater glory of his dramas alone has obscured the lesser glory of his poems ; for even in these he will suffer in comparison with few besides himself. For my present purpose, the poems are noticeable chiefly as indicating the quality of his powers at the time, and the direction they were then taking. In these works, as Coleridge has remarked, "we have at once strong promises of the strength, and yet obvious proofs of the immaturity of his genius." Their boundless variety and profusion of imagery, show how well his creative faculties had been provided for in the school of nature ; while at the same time they are pervaded with a solidity and compactness of thought, which would seem incredible, did we not know how much more rapidly, as well as logically, thought may be expressed in images than in propositions. Intellect and imagination are almost overwhelmed by the redundancy of thoughts and images

here let in upon them; yet thought and image are so perfectly interfused, that neither seems able to exist without the other; and both are driven down into such density and concentration, that they occupy together less space than would be required for either alone. Alluding to this fact, Coleridge has said what few, indeed, but Coleridge could say: "In Shakspeare's poems, the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace. Each, in its excess of strength, seems to threaten the extinction of the other. At length, in the drama, they were reconciled, and fought each with its shield before the breast of the other."

In these poems, moreover, there is the same total absence of the author's thoughts and feelings, the same perfect aloofness of his own individuality from the representation, which stands out so conspicuously in his dramas. He is himself no part of the object revealed, but only the light that reveals. It is as if some all-seeing genius had overlooked the entire scene, contemplating with perfect indifference the inmost thoughts and feelings of the persons, and then brought the whole before our minds, at the same time transferring to us its own all-seeing faculty. It is partly owing to this circumstance, no doubt, that the intense displays of passion, arising from the subject of one of these poems, find so little sympathy in the reader's mind. The poet himself seems not to have sympathized with them, and to have related them, not because he chose to do so, but simply because he could not omit them without falsifying the representation. Add to this, that the vapours of sensual emotion are constantly blown away by the strong gale of thoughts and images, which rushes

through the reader's mind, and the triumph of the author's genius over the impurity of the subject is rendered complete. One has little motive to read it for an ill purpose, he has to work so hard in order to follow it; and his mind is kept so much on the stretch in reading, that he is in little danger of reading it with ill effect.

The last thing I shall notice in these poems, is the exquisite sweetness of the versification;—the spirit of melody which the author has everywhere breathed into and through them. The thoughts seem to have warbled themselves out in music spontaneously; the words seem to have known their places, and to have arranged themselves in “harmonious numbers” of their own accord. The melody, therefore, does not appear an external appendage, used merely to set off the other elements, but is itself an essential element of the living structure; thought, image and music, are not mixed, but *grown* together into an organic whole, so that the life of each is bound up in the union of all. Perhaps there can be no stronger proof of genius than this. Mere talent, indeed, by incessant study and practice can bring thoughts, images, and numbers together into the appearance of poetry, just as it can bring matter, and color, and form together into an artificial flower; but this innate, essential, and spontaneous melodiousness of soul and of utterance, is the gift, perhaps the crowning gift of genius, and of genius alone. “Mellifluous Shakspeare” is one, and certainly not the least appropriate, of the many titles that have been given to our poet.

SONNETS.

THE only works of Shakspeare's, in which the author appears at all in his own person, are his sonnets. These are said to have been written at different intervals during a period of about fifteen years, and were all first published, in a collected form, in his forty-fifth year. Many of them are to be ranked among the finest in the language; among those of Spenser, and Milton, and Wordsworth. "With this key, Shakspeare unlocked his heart." The interior life of the poet, what he thought and felt as a man, is here laid open to our view, insomuch that some have supposed a tolerably accurate and complete biography of the author for the time might be gleaned from them. Of their merits, save as they afford a clew to his views and feelings respecting himself, his prospects and pursuits, I shall not attempt to speak. Abounding, indeed, in the conceits and affectations of the time, they nevertheless frequently display a calm, subdued intensity of feeling, a reach and grasp of thought, and a beauty of conception, which have rarely been surpassed, and which show, that to sound the depths and scale the heights of our being, formed a part of his familiar recreations. Numerous passages might be gathered from them, each of which would furnish matter for a lengthy discourse. They are dedicated to a Mr. W. H., as "the only beggetter of these ensuing Sonnets;" a male friend, evidently full of youth, and beauty, and nobility, whom Mr. Hallam concludes, with great apparent reason, to have been William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, said to have been "the most universally loved and esteemed

of any man of the age." It would seem, however, that a portion of the sonnets must have sprung from an attachment to a female friend, or more-than-friend; and as they were written at different times, so they were probably inspired by different persons. Who this female friend was, if indeed she was any particular person, we have no means of ascertaining. As Shakspeare visited Stratford annually, during his stay in London, and as he gave no evidence that his conjugal indifference had ever deepened into alienation, it seems but just to presume, that these sonnets were but the random expressions of a heart, some of whose feelings were without an object.

What may have been the nature or extent of the intercourse between Shakspeare and young Herbert, we are altogether ignorant. As Herbert was "a young man very well bred, and of excellent parts, having a great proportion of learning, and a ready wit to apply it, and enlarge upon it," and, withal, "of a pleasant and facetious humour, and a disposition affable, generous and magnificent;" we can readily conceive how he and Shakspeare, notwithstanding the decided seniority of the latter, should have taken strongly to each other. Some of the sonnets addressed to him contain expressions of an attachment deep as life; yet it is hardly possible to doubt of their sincerity.

"When, in the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste :
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,

And weep afresh love's long-since cancelled woe,
 And mourn the loss of many a vanished sight ;
 But if, the while, I think of thee, dear friend,
 All losses are restored, all sorrows end."

In the following, it is hard to say whether the friend or the poet appears to more advantage :

"From you I have been absent in the spring,
 When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,
 Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
 That heavy Saturn laughed and leaped with him.
 Yet, nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
 Of flowers, different in odour and in hue,
 Could make me any summer's story tell,
 Or pluck them from their proud lap where they grew :
 Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
 Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose ;
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
 Yet seemed it winter still, and, you away,
 As with your shadow, I with these did play."

Such passages as these show at once how deeply he could love, and how divinely he could sing. There is, indeed, a redundancy of feeling in them, which almost causes one's eyes to gush with emotion. This instance of friendship is truly one of the sweetest and sunniest spots in literary history, and affords a lesson as precious as it is rare, as refreshing as it is humiliating. Amidst the general indifference of human life, where people sear up their gentler feelings, and sit apart in the solitude of their own selfishness, it seems hardly credible that one man should have felt thus towards another.

That this noble youth, with all his gifts, had that

within which makes temptation dangerous, is evident from these sonnets themselves; and we learn from other sources, that "his virtues and good inclinations were clouded with great infirmities, which he had in too exorbitant a proportion;" and that "he indulged himself in all kinds of pleasure, and in almost all excesses." Being "master of a great fortune from his ancestors," and receiving, withal, a great addition by his wife, "for which," we are told, "he paid much too dear, by taking her person into the bargain;" he could not make it all serve his expense, but "sacrificed himself, his precious time, and much of his estate in those excessive indulgences," and finally "died of an apoplexy, after a full and cheerful supper." These particulars we learn from Clarendon, who informs us, moreover, that "he lived many years about the court, before in it, and never by it:" that "after the fall of Somerset, he was made chamberlain of the king's house, more for the court's sake than his own; and the court appeared with the more lustre, because he had the government of that province:" that "as he spent and lived upon his own fortune, so he stood upon his own feet, without any other support than his proper virtue and merit:" that "he was exceedingly beloved at court, because he never desired to get that for himself, which others laboured for, but was still ready to promote the pretences of worthy men:" and that, "as his conversation was chiefly with men of the most pregnant parts and understanding, so towards any, who needed support and encouragement, though unknown, if fairly recommended to him, he was very liberal."

From this account of the man, we may readily infer

the qualities of the youth, and also understand the reason of Shakspeare's solicitude as well as affection for him; for the poet appears no less concerned for the virtue than attached to the person of his friend.

"O, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
For that sweet ornament which truth doth give!
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live."

Again;

"The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die;
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves its dignity."

And again;

"How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!—
O, what a mansion home those vices got,
Which, for their habitation chose out thee!
Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot,
And all things turn to fair, that eyes can see!
Take heed, dear friend, of this large privilege!"—
—————"I love thee in such sort,
That, thou being mine, mine is thy good report."

From such passages as these we gather, that the liberties which wait upon wit, wealth, beauty and nobility combined, had proved, as indeed they well might, dangerous food to young Pembroke. And the gentle, yet earnest reproofs and warnings, which the poet thus throws out, while they prove the waywardness of his

youthful friend, also prove his own friendship to have been as pure as it was warm. Shakspeare's virtue, however, was not of that sanctimonious, puritanical sort, which has to vindicate and manifest itself by forsaking or avoiding a straying friend. His attachment was as constant as it was intense; prompting that sentiment so worthy of a noble and generous nature:

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds:
O no; it is an ever fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown,”——
“And bears it out even to the edge of doom.”

Through these extracts, if I mistake not, we may discern a gentleness and affectionateness of disposition, which ought to endear the poet to us as much as they raise him above us.

But there are other passages in these sonnets which exhibit the man in a light no less worthy of our regard, and disclose still further the moral riches of his character. In all his plenitude and consciousness of power, there appears a humility of spirit, which, coveting nothing but the excellencies of others, thought of nothing but imperfections in himself.

“When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And vex deaf Heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,—

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
 Featured like him, like him of friends possessed,
 Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
 With what I most possess contented least,
 And in these thoughts myself almost despising ;—
 Haply I think on thee ; and then my state
 Is like the lark at break of day uprising
 From earth, and singing hymns at heaven's gate."

In these effusions, moreover, there is manifested a keen sense of the degradation of his pursuit, a corroding grief at the vices which disgraced the name of player, a profound penitence in view of his self-abuse, and a jealous watchfulness over his own life, which might well put to blush the virtues of the best of us.

"Alas ! 'tis true I have gone here and there,
 And made myself a motley to the view,
 Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear ;
 Most true it is, that I have looked on truth
 Askance and strangely."

And again :

"O, for my sake do you with fortune chide,
 The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
 That did not better for my life provide,
 Than public means, which public manners breeds.
 Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
 And almost thence my nature is subdued
 To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

Out-gushings also of feelings almost too sacred and private for utterance are scattered here, which show us what sad work experience had made with the hopes and dreams which swarmed around the beatings of his youthful heart.

“ Full many a glorious morning have I seen,
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;
Anon, permit the basest clouds to ride,
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace :
Even so one early morn my sun did shine,
With all triumphant splendour on his brow ;
But out, alas ! he was but one hour mine ;
The reigning cloud hath masked him from me now.”

But there are yet other passages in these sonnets, which throw still greater beauty over the traits I have mentioned. If Shakspeare had felt himself inferior to the object of his attachment, and had thought he could live only as a parasite of something greater than himself, his gentleness and generosity of speech would bear a much less noble interpretation. But enough had already transpired to teach him that he was not made to borrow fame of others, and that his was one of the few names “ that were not born to die.” He knew, and, with an assurance as modest as it is firm, has said, that it was his to give, not beg, the crown of immortality. His generosity, therefore, was of that sort, which, instead of expecting or wishing to be borne to heaven on the wings of another’s fame, sought rather to bear others thither on the wings of his own. It has been said indeed, and a thousand times repeated, that Shakspeare was utterly unconscious of his powers, and did not presume to dream of fame ; and the queen-like indifference with which he abandoned his intellectual

offspring to the tender mercies of the stage, has been cited as irrefutable proof of this position. I know not whether such a notion be more unjust to Shakspeare or more false in itself; and those who originated and those who repeated it, must either have been ignorant of his sonnets, or else have trusted more in their own inferences than in his most explicit declarations. There are numerous passages in these sonnets, which entirely refute this position; which put its improbability altogether beyond question.

“Devouring time, blunt thou the lion’s paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger’s jaws,
And burn the long-lived phœnix in her blood;
And do whate’er thou wilt, swift-footed time;
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
O, carve not with thy hours my friend’s fair brow,
And draw no lines there with thy antique pen:
Yet, do thy worst, old time! despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse live ever young.”

Again:

“Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor sword of Mars, nor war’s quick fire shall burn
This living record of your memory.
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o’erread,
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead.”

Again :

“Death shall not brag thou wanderest in his shade,
When in eternal lives to time thou growest ;
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”

Again :

“Now, with the drops of this most balmy time,
My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,
Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes ;
And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.”

And, finally :

“The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,
And the sad augurs mock their own presage ;
Uncertainties now crown themselves assured,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.”

Truly these passages, and various others like them, look a little like dreaming of fame ; or rather, they look like clear visions into a land of which others are able only to dream ! It is undoubtedly true, however, that Shakspeare did not spend his time in trying to convince himself and others, that he *ought* to be immortal. With a noble philosophy, as inimitable as it was unpretending, he simply took care to do his work, leaving the care of his fame with those to whom it properly belonged. Whether he fully appreciated the worth of his productions, may indeed be a question ; but this question is not to be decided in the negative, on the simple fact, that he did not choose to prate and fret about it, and

surely his neglect of them may have sprung quite as legitimately from the quiet assurance, as from the silent despair of immortality. On the whole, this carefully revising of one's works, and correcting of the proof-sheets for the press, and snugly embalming them up for posterity, evinces rather the intense desire than the conscious desert of immortality. That Shakspeare neglected to do all this, may be thought, by some, to prove that he knew his works had a principle of life in them, and therefore needed no embalmings of his to protect them from the tooth of time. Or rather, with his far-reaching insight of nature, he could not well be ignorant, that it is equally impossible to get up an immortality where it is not deserved, and to keep it down where it is deserved; and that if it will not come of its own accord, it is quite useless attempting to force it, or to manufacture it.

To my mind there is something rather ignoble in the way of thinking which represents this divinest of mortals as toiling only for money and bread, altogether thoughtless and reckless of fame; however this may have been the case in his earlier years, before he became aware of his powers from seeing their effects, or had any proof of his genius, save, perhaps, the desire, which he was doubtless too wise to mistake for the thing desired. When he came to know himself by his fruits (for this is what such men judge themselves by) then he was of course ambitious, as he ought to be, of doing what he had good reason to think himself able to do. The truth is, this notion, that I am opposing, looks too much like attempting to explain away the poet's more than virgin modesty into mere girlish bashfulness;

to sink the humility with which he wore his gifts and honours into unconsciousness of their existence. In a word, it is simply hiding from ourselves his goodness, by hiding from him his greatness; and accounting for a virtue seemingly impossible for us, by supposing an ignorance really impossible for him. Assuredly, Shakspeare was neither above nor below "the last infirmity of noble minds;" and those who live but to eat, and drink, and strut, and be rich, must not think to have him ranked in their category.

Such, then, are some of the confessions and unbosomings of Shakspeare simply as a man. I have dwelt on them the longer, because in his other works, he seems but a voice from the land of melody and beauty,—a circumstance that hides from us the sweet humanity of this most human-hearted of men;—and because we can better appreciate the ideal loveliness of his *Mirandas*, and *Cordelias*, and *Imogenes*, after sympathizing with the real loveliness of the mind from which they sprung. And besides, self-sufficing moralists, who think there can be no goodness but by embracing their doctrines and following their precepts, have so generally eschewed the society of genius, and consigned its fascinations to the service of Satan, that some not ignoble minds have been hugely tempted to eschew them for the society of those whom they have renounced. And, on the other hand, pride, choosing to be thought wicked rather than weak, has so often intrenched itself behind the examples of inferior genius, and tried to steal its reputation by aping its deformities, that even among the truly good, genius has almost come to be viewed as little better than another name for wicked-

ness. It seems but proper, every way, therefore, for us to know, that this king of poets and philosophers was also among the best of men ; that, in his character, modesty and humility kept pace with greatness ; and that he was as much better than the *beau-ideals* of our intellectual popinjays and dandiprats, as those *beau-ideals* were prouder than he. We cannot be too deeply impressed with the truth, that he who looks the highest will always bow the lowest ; that true gentleness and lowliness of heart are inseparable accompaniments of exalted conceptions ; and that the loftiest minds are those which most converse and sympathize with the heavens. From contemplating Shakspeare's character, I dare affirm that the highest moral as well as intellectual inspiration may be caught ; and it is not well to push from our thoughts his goodness of heart to make room for his amazing greatness of mind.

“ More sweet than odours caught by him who sails
Near spicy shores of Araby the blest,
A thousand times more exquisitely sweet,
The freight of holy feeling which we meet
In thoughtful moments, wafted by the gales
From fields where good men walk, or bowers wherein they
rest.”

LECTURE II.

PERCEPTIVE POWERS—CREATIVE POWERS—WIT AND HUMOUR—
SENSIBILITY—ALLEGED IMMORALITY.

OF Shakspeare's life and character as a man, I finished what I had to say, in my last lecture. In this I shall attempt to speak more definitely of the combination of gifts which enabled him to produce his works. My reasons for doing so, doubtless obvious enough themselves, are these: The structure and method of Shakspeare's mind furnish, perhaps, the richest theme for psychological investigation in human history. He who fully comprehends the length, and breadth, and height, and depth of Shakspeare's endowments, has not much more to learn of the human mind. As the theme exhausts the whole science of human thought and feeling, so it is of course inexhaustible itself. The faculties, moreover, and the productions of such a mind, are mutually illustrative; a preconception of either will very much aid one in understanding the other: indeed, we must first enter into the method and working of an artist's mind, before we can do justice to his work, or his work can do justice to us.

The first thing, then, that meets us in studying Shakspeare's mind, is, his wonderful depth and clearness of vision. A most penetrating insight lies at the bottom of all his other gifts, and supports his whole intellectual

structure. In the words of Carlyle, "he does not look *at* a thing merely, but into it, through it, so that he constructively comprehends it, can take it asunder and put it together again; the thing melts, as it were, into light under his eye, and anew *creates* itself before him." His vision does not stop at the accidents or even the attributes of an object, but dives at once to its soul, its essence, and views its attributes through this. A resistless intellectual energy dwells in him, which at once strips off the husk, and rives the heart of a matter, and lays bare its living laws. And this power not only looks round and through things in their individual existence, but looks beyond them into their relations to other things; sees therefore how in any given circumstances they will act, or be acted upon; how they will affect other things, or be affected by them.

Most of us see things only in their phenomena; Shakspeare sees them in their principles: we study their history, and infer their nature; he seizes their nature, and infers their history: we learn what they are by observing what they do; he sees at once what they are, and can prophesy what they will do. Viewing effects, not as they come up in detail and succession, but in the causes that produce them, he can therefore anticipate and pre-announce them with as much essential accuracy as they can announce themselves. While, for example, we can scarce discern the form and structure of a tree when it stands full-grown before us, Shakspeare discerns its whole form and structure, as it were, in the seed from which it springs. Or take any human institution, the institution, for example, of knighthood: Shakspeare does not learn its nature by poring over

an obscure heap of historical records, but penetrates at once to the fundamental principle which built up and organized the whole fabric; and therefore can write its history in substance without studying it. In the parent germ, as it were, he discerns the whole systems of feelings, and sentiments, which will in due time grow out of it. Once more, take any given actual person; Shakspeare does not need to wander, like the rest of us, through the facts of his past life, to arrive at his character, but seizes at a glance the actuating principle of his being; and, from the inexhaustible variety of forms and images at his command, can reveal the character better, perhaps, in a few minutes, than the character can reveal itself in as many years. Disentangling, as it were, and drawing out the pure reality from the dreamy, unreal mixtures which everywhere darken and obstruct it, he bodies it forth in more transpicuous and more expressive forms. Accordingly, Goethe has compared his characters to watches with crystalline cases and plates, which, while they point out with perfect accuracy the course of the hours and minutes, at the same time disclose the whole combination of springs and wheels whereby they are moved. Therefore it is that his characters often seem more real than the characters about us, because the former are given to us cleared from the perplexities and obscurations which more or less cloud the simplest characters of real life from our vision.

Wherefore, of Shakspeare we may almost say what Dr. South has so nobly said of Adam before the fall:—“He came into the world a philosopher; could view essences in themselves, and read forms without the

comment of their respective properties: he could see consequents yet dormant in their principles, and effects yet unborn and in the womb of their causes: his understanding could almost pierce into future contingents; his conjectures improving even to prophecy and the certainties of prediction." Nor is Shakspeare altogether alone in this. Burke, in like manner, seems to have known the history of the French revolution before it occurred, and is even thought by some to have written it better than it has been written since. In the principles then at work he saw what results were coming; and his history is better than others, in that with him the results are kept in the back-ground of their principles, while with the others the principles are more or less obscure beneath their results; as springs are sometimes hidden beneath their own issues.

Phrenologists tell us, and truly no doubt, that a man's whole character is written in the exterior configuration of his head. Nay more; a man's whole character is probably written in his thumb-nail, had we but senses fine enough to read it there; but whether science can make it legible to us in either place, is another question. So, also, a man's entire character is doubtless contained in every sentence he utters, and every act he performs, had we but faculties acute enough to discern it there; and Shakspeare's faculties were to the words and actions of men, much the same as his senses would be to their physical structure, who should perceive their whole character in their thumb-nails.

Newton, as every body knows, is said to have seized, in the falling of an apple, the principle from which, with a few data gained by study and observation, he demon-

strated, in the retirement of his closet, the movements and masses of the heavenly bodies. The same insight which Newton thus exercised on one subject, Shakspeare seems to have exercised on every subject that came before him. He thus dwelt in a world, not merely of material appearances, but of vital powers; the forms of nature yielded up their secret, indwelling, and out-shaping life, whenever and wherever they met the glance of his eye. Upon the vital powers, too, which thus everywhere disclosed themselves to his vision, he could bring to bear a species of psychological mathematics as infinite and infallible in regard to human thought and action, as Newton's mathematics were in regard to astronomy. Wherefore, as Newton could weigh the planets and mark out their orbits from the laws that impel and control them; as he could compute the effects of the various influences around them, how their movements would modify and be modified by each other, from their powers and places in the solar system: so Shakspeare could weigh the characters and describe the movements of men, whether real or imaginary, from the principles which organize and actuate them; could compute what influences they would originate and what they would undergo; how they would affect the objects around them from within, and be affected by those objects from without.

The natural result of this depth and ubiquity of insight, is the most extensive and accurate knowledge. He sees whatever is before him, and knows whatever he sees. The hardest problems are but playthings to him. One stroke of his intellectual arm splits asunder the knottiest subject, and discloses its inmost fibres.

Measuring at sight the powers and susceptibilities of whatever comes before him, he can travel backwards from a given effect to its true cause, or forwards from a given cause to its proper effect. He therefore never mistakes nor mismatches cause and effect, but always brings them together in precisely such order and proportion as nature hath joined them. Seeing, too, in all cases exactly what the thing is, he of course sees what it is not; distinguishes clearly its essence from its accidents; can draw out the former from all disguises and perplexities, and contemplate it in its naked distinctness. Under his eye the thing leaps out, as it were, from amid the circumstantialities which embarrass and obscure it to ordinary eyes, and stands apart in its precise form, its clear, definite individuality. He can therefore bring things together under their essential relations, however remote they may be from each other, or he can strip them out of their arbitrary relations, however closely they may stand together. As a philosopher he can associate them under the most intimate, actual analogies, or as a wit he can link them under the most remote, fanciful analogies.

Of books, therefore, Shakspeare has little need; on his own account, indeed, he needs them not at all, but only for the sake of others; not to aid him in the acquisition, but only in the communication of knowledge. For he has himself the keys to whatever stores of knowledge are accessible to man; so that, as one of the greatest of scholars long ago said of him, no sooner does any subject of human thought occur to him than he understands it better than all who have studied it, and unfolds it better than all who have written upon it.

The expression which he puts into the mouth of Brutus,—

“You are my true and honourable wife, ——
As dear to me, as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart,”

suggests the whole secret of the circulation of the blood, which science has since glorified herself so much for discovering. In Lear's madness, also, he is known to have anticipated the results of all the scientific investigation since his day, insomuch that physicians consult it and follow it as the history of an actual case. Competent medical men have assured me, that the closest observation of facts has not been able to detect the slightest error in his representation of this disease. Thus do nature and Shakspeare involve the results of the finest and deepest analysis, though they do not make the analysis; and science spends centuries in coming round to the point whence they started.

Whether this be the result of a natural prescience, or of a most subtile experience; whether it come by intuition of principles or by observation of facts, makes equally for the force and fineness of Shakspeare's perceptive faculties. So keen, indeed, is his perception of truth, so piercing his insight even how things *should* be, that he is never more natural than when he creates beings and characters which nature does not, and, so far as we know, cannot produce. It is as if he had looked through the world of matter into the world of spirit, and prosecuted his studies amongst a race of supernatural beings; for even here, as Schlegel says, “he extorts from us the assenting conviction, that if such

beings should exist, they would be and do as he represents them." He has thus carried nature, so to speak, beyond herself; extended the actual out over the possible; and peopled the remotest fields of imagination with all the truth and appearance of reality. Were I to venture an opinion, I should say, it is this sovereignty over truth and nature, so that he leads or sends them whithersoever he lists, that forms his peculiar, excellent gift.

Another result of Shakspeare's deep, clear vision, is, that, unlike the rest of us, he never mistakes the workings of his own mind, or the impressions of his own feelings, for the qualities and movements of external objects. Hence the pure objectiveness of his representations, which makes him seem but an omnipresent, and, if I may be allowed the expression, omniloquent voice. He never confounds his own individuality with that of his characters; never, like Byron, thrusts himself upon us under the names and through the faces of his different persons. In a word, he distinguishes perfectly between himself and the object of his thought, and therefore never discloses the one when he means to disclose the other. The thing stands before him in its exact shape and colour, unmodified by his own thoughts, untinged by his own feelings; and the pure white light of his intellect reveals the whole thing without being visible itself. Undoubtedly much of this was owing to his singular purity of heart, his freedom from every thing like conceit, and pride, and vanity; his willingness to make his characters every thing, himself nothing; to keep behind his subject, instead of getting upon it. So that it seems doubtful whether this perfect self-alooftness from his rep-

representations declares more strongly for his purity or for his perspicacity of mind ; whether his self-oblivion sprung from clearness of sight, or his clear-sightedness from oblivion of self. His genius, in short, was like sunlight, which, always taking the precise form and colour of the object it shines upon, makes every thing else visible, but remains itself unseen.

Herein Shakspeare differs altogether from Milton. Milton concentrates all things into himself, and melts them down into his own individuality ; Shakspeare darts himself forth into all things, and melts down his individuality into theirs. Every page of Milton's writings exhibits a full-length portrait of the author ; the perfect absence of Shakspeare from his own pages, makes it difficult for us to conceive of a human being's having written them. The secret of this probably is, Milton had nearly all of Shakspeare's imagination, but perhaps not a tithe of Shakspeare's vision. The former might have created a thousand characters, and all would have been but modifications of himself ; the latter did create nearly a thousand, and not an element of himself can be found in one of them. Thus Milton transforms all the objects of his contemplation into himself, while Shakspeare transforms himself into whatever object he contemplates ; the one makes us see his own image in all things, the other makes us see every thing but his own image.

And the same thing holds true, for most part, of Shakspeare's contemporary dramatists. They cannot keep themselves, their sentiments, and associations, and prepossessions out of their characters. In the form either of contrast or of resemblance, something of their

own individuality is mingled in whatever they represent. The reason of which appears to be, that they are continually mistaking their internal emotions for outward objects, cannot apprehend and distinguish a thing in its independent, substantive existence, but only as related to themselves, as evincing their powers, and expressing or opposing their opinions. Always seeing, perhaps always seeking, themselves in what they write, they therefore give us, not real, self-subsistent, individual persons, but mere projections and personifications of their own thoughts and fancies. Accordingly, after reading their plays, "we remember a mass of things, but nothing distinctly;" the characters soon get confused and run together, and appear rather as mere phases of an individual than as distinct individuals; and what they say seems rather to have come through them, than from them; not so much the utterance of their minds, as something put into their mouths from behind. These authors could, indeed, get up fine representations, but they could not clearly distinguish the things represented, so as to separate them out in their full, precise individuality. Their works are rather fine shows than good plays; better fitted to delight the eye than to feed the mind; and therein like the modern arrangements of the stage, which seem to proceed on the assumption that eyes are more plenty than minds.

In regard to words, Shakspeare has the same perspicacity as in regard to things. His speech, up to the utmost capacities of language, is as infallible as his perception. His words do not seem selected from a multitude, any other of which would do nearly or quite as well, but he seizes the best and fittest at once, and

therefore has no room for choice among them. His thoughts, indeed, seem to have selected and assimilated the precise verbal elements best fitted for their organic development, as the vital power of a plant draws together and converts into its own structure the appropriate elements of the soil at its feet. His language, therefore, is not the mere dress of his thoughts, which may be varied or changed at pleasure; but their living embodiment; the twain are one flesh and one life, not merely articulated together like a nice piece of mechanism, but grown together like body and soul. To prove this, one need but try to express his thoughts in any other language than he has himself given them. The thing cannot be done. The moment we take the thought out of the language in which he has fixed it, it flies like a disembodied spirit beyond our power. We might almost as well attempt to transfer a human soul into any other body than nature hath assigned it. Thus, in Shakspeare's hands, thought truly incarnates itself in words, and words become alive with the spirit of thought; into the body of language he breathes the breath of intellectual life, so that the language itself becomes a living soul.

With most authors language is as hard and stiff as granite. It comes from them shaped and coloured exactly as they find it. Instead of governing it, they are governed by it; they shape and submit their minds to its pre-existing forms, instead of moulding and subjecting it to the law of their minds. It is therefore the tyrant, not the servant of their thoughts. But with Shakspeare, language became as soft and limber as water at the fountain. He was its master, and in his

mind it obeyed no laws, for it knew none, but his. Without shape or colour of its own, it assumed under his plastic hand the precise shape and colour of his thoughts.—Words have obeyed some others from convenience, they obeyed him from necessity. He is the true Adam of English literature: both things and words heard and came at his call, the former to receive names, the latter to be given to them. He is enough of himself to immortalize the English tongue; he has made it as imperishable and almost as inimitable as the Greek. Well might Wordsworth say,

“We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
Which Shakspeare spake; the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held: in every thing we are sprung
Of earth’s first blood, have titles manifold!”

CREATIVE POWERS.

SHAKSPEARE’S creative powers were commensurate with his perceptive powers. Whatsoever his vision could grasp, his imagination could vivify and body forth, giving it “a local habitation and a name.” Coleridge calls him “an omnipresent creativeness;” and the more we think of this expression, huge as it seems, the truer I suspect we shall find it. For no sooner does he apprehend or conceive a thing than it forthwith becomes alive, and passes into organic form, so as to seem a thing of nature, growing and developing itself visibly before us. Whatever he goes about, imagination and understanding are equally present and active in the work, the former putting life into every thing the latter

perceives, the latter putting truth into every thing the former creates. Thus freely interchanging their functions and provinces, the two cannot be divorced, can scarcely be distinguished. Accordingly his poetry is instinctively philosophical, and his philosophy instinctively poetical: histories come from him like pure creations, and creations like pure histories. In a word, his creative and perceptive faculties are constantly playing into each other's hands and perfecting each other's work; and it is hard to tell whether he carries more of imagination into the regions of truth, or more of truth into the regions of imagination.

In vital powers, Shakspeare's mind seems as inexhaustible as nature is in the materials for their embodiment. For boundless variety and perfect individuality of character, he is quite proverbial. From his hand the lord and the tinker, the hero and the valet, come forth equally clear and distinct; as he has no confusion about them in his own mind, so he leaves none in the minds of others. Indeed all his characters, from the least to the greatest, numerous as they are, stand out in the most intense individual life, perfectly rounded in with the distinctness of actual persons, so that we know them as well and remember them as distinctly as we do our most intimate friends: and whether the development of them be concentrated into a few lines, or extended through a whole play, it seems free alike from deficiency and from redundancy, so that nothing can be added or taken away without injuring the effect. As his persons are in no wise mere shadows or resemblances of things, but the very things themselves, so of course they cannot be repeated; no two of them can

run together, nor any one of them run into another; but each has to think his own thoughts, speak his own words, use his own limbs, and perform his own acts. So that Shakspeare never animates the same body with different souls, nor different bodies with the same soul, as so many others have done; never sends us an old acquaintance in the garb of a stranger, nor a stranger in the garb of an old acquaintance. He gives us ten characters where almost any other man gives us one; and one of his characters has as much vitality as almost any other man's ten; his poorest, as much individuality as almost any other man's best. All of which but shows the boundless opulence of his creative faculty. And for aught we can see, he might have gone on until now, had he lived so long, creating characters just as vital, as original, and as individual as any he has given us. He seems, indeed, to have wanted nothing but length of days, to have rivalled nature herself in the number as well as the truth of his characters. In a word, his imagination was as exhaustless as the sea! Coleridge's expression, oceanic mind, with its implied idea of multitudinous unity, is the truest and aptest figure that has been given of him yet.

But this opulence and energy of the creative faculty, so conspicuous in the variety and vitality of individual characters, attains, if possible, a still higher form in the perfect organic unity and integrity of his dramatic combinations. For, try them as we will, we shall find all the characters of a given play necessary to the development and illustration of each. No one can be and appear what it really is, without the presence of all the

others. As in his development of single characters, nothing can be added or taken away without endangering the subject's life ; so in his dramatic combinations of character, cut away any individual, and the drama will bleed to death. So true it is, that in Shakspeare's works—as indeed in all works of the imagination, whose rules, as hath been well said, are themselves the very powers of growth and production—the parts are not merely made and placed, but grow up what and where they are of their own accord ; they are thus and there as a matter of course, like a thing of nature, and because they cannot be otherwise.

It seems impossible, therefore, to decide whether Shakspeare had more of genius or more of judgment ; whether the creative or the perceptive faculties bore the greater part in his work : or rather he appears now “of imagination all compact,” now of understanding all compact, according as we choose to view him. For no sooner did he conceive the germ of a character, than he also foresaw whatever circumstances and influences of earth and of sky were best fitted to mould and develop it. So that while he shows an imagination that compassed the heavens, and might have given all the possible forms of human character ; he at the same time shows an understanding that compassed the earth, and might have produced a *Novum Organum*, or administered the mightiest monarchies. This marvellous combination of faculties, which has never been baptized into any name but Shakspeare, I know not how to describe, but by saying, it studies and knows things and persons, not in their details, but in their rudiments and first principles ; and that it so informs these rudiments with life

and living power, that all the details spring up spontaneously in their appropriate place and form.

WIT AND HUMOUR.

I HAVE already alluded, in passing, to Shakspeare's wit. If the most intimate and essential relations of things are open to him, the most remote, fanciful resemblances are equally so. Accordingly, the most far-fetched and unthought-of combinations come from him with the same exquisite propriety as the most natural and life-like creations; and it is hard to say whether he has more power to startle and amuse us by his wit, or to instruct and elevate us by his wisdom. Things as far asunder as the spheres, and seemingly as oppugnant as fire and water, under his eye develop some secret affinity, and fly together into the closer union for the very distance that lay between them. For the infinite remoteness and subtilty, yet perfect appropriateness of its analogies, Mercutio's description of Queen Mab, and indeed whatever comes from Mercutio, probably surpasses any thing else in existence. The electric spark of wit lurks in his very tears, and even his sighs, while coming out, instinctively wreath themselves into jokes. Mercutio is indeed the prince of wits, though he has many younger sisters and brothers. The character, accordingly, has long been the standard with which all other wits are compared and measured. And the same quality, though in different forms, and nowhere else with the same exquisite delicacy and polish, is scattered, like morning dews, through various other parts of the poet's works.

The very sensuality of old Falstaff, as every body knows, is continually blossoming out into wit, as foam rises from the agitation of impure water. There is salt enough in the single character to keep whole libraries from rotting.

Different critics are constantly placing Shakspeare's distinctive excellence in different things, according perhaps to the leading bent of their own minds and tastes. For he always seems to excel in whatever aspect we are most inclined to view him; and however different, and even opposite we may be to each other, he appears to us severally just like ourselves, only more so, as if he were the development of what lies enveloped in us all,—in whom all our latent peculiarities had blossomed out and gone to seed. Whenever he undertakes to be a wit, he becomes just as perfectly so as if he never had been and never could be any thing else. And, indeed, no sooner does he conceive any purpose, whether of wit or of wisdom, than all his faculties converge upon it; so that he always seems to us better now than he ever had been before, or ever could be again; and whatsoever he is now doing, we wish he

“ Might ever do

Nothing but that; move still, still so, and own

No other function.”

Wherefore some have very naturally reckoned wit to be Shakspeare's peculiar faculty. And on the same principle lawyers have been wont to conjecture that he must have made the law his peculiar study, forasmuch as he is deeply skilled in the principles, and even in the technicalities of jurisprudence: and I know not where

has been the divine that understood divinity so well as he did ; his theology is quite as good, I suspect, as any that has since come from theological seminaries. It is even said that butchers have found something in him, which led them to suppose that he had served an apprenticeship at their trade. Thus he surpasses us all in our several vocations, and seems master of all the learning wherein the rest of us are but students. Accordingly Hazlitt, speaking of the most celebrated English poets, says : " The characteristic of Chaucer, is intensity ; of Spenser, remoteness ; of Milton, elevation ; of Shakspeare, *every thing*."

Far richer, however, and rarer than wit, is another quality of Shakspeare's mind. A deep, genial humour dwells in him, which is more akin to wisdom than to wit, or rather, which is a particular form of wisdom herself. As wit is the antithesis of dulness, so humour is the antithesis of contempt. Wit is more the jubilee of the head, and makes us laugh at others ; humour is more the jubilee of the heart, and makes us laugh with others. Wit may co-exist with excessive pride and spitefulness of temper, with mockery and scorn ; may, in fact, be made the vehicle of them ; humour, genuine humour, has no fellowship with either, cannot co-exist with them at all. The Dunciad, for example, and English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, are perfect breviaries of wit, spoken from the mouths of spitfire pride and spite ; each is a continued sneer ; a sort of malignant, sardonic grin, backed up by the most caustic pungency, and evincing no heart at all, or a very bad heart.

Again, wit manifests itself, for most part, in single expressions ; it is a flash as short, generally, as it is sud-

den; or at best a series of scintillations following flash upon flash, and producing an appearance of continuity by its rapidity of succession, like the apparent ring of fire when one whirls rapidly a lighted stick. Humour, on the other hand, is a soft, moist, playful light, manifesting itself, in Shakspeare, in whole characters, or combinations of character, or even throughout entire plays. Falstaff and his retinue, Nick Bottom and his troop, Dogberry, Verges and company, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and their associates, are, if I mistake not, conceived and executed in the spirit of the deepest, genialest humour, and Troilus and Cressida seems but a continued humorous irony on that masterpiece of ancient Quixotism, the Trojan war. Homer took altogether the serious side of the matter, and accordingly it sustains him, or rather he sustains it, perennially at the summit of epic poetry. The laughable side of the same thing seems to have been reserved on purpose for Shakspeare to make a mock tragedy out of. Cervantes, in like manner, catching the ludicrous side of chivalry, gave us the adventures of Don Quixote, and is generally ranked at the head of humorists. Perhaps, however, the humour of Cervantes only appears greater than Shakspeare's, for that in the former it is the prominent quality, whereas in the latter there is no prominence of one quality over another.

Shakspeare's all-sidedness and equal-sidedness of mind would of course bring him to know the ludicrous as well as the serious side of things. Accordingly his genius ranged freely and irresistibly from the sublimest pathos to the most grotesque drollery, from the most heart-rending tragedy to the most side-shaking comedy.

He understood and sympathized equally with the laughable and the lamentable, and his roar at the former was just as genuine and disinterested as his tear at the latter. His love of fun was as boundless and as innocent as his love of truth. And his "wit-combats" with Ben Jonson, so quaintly described by honest old Fuller, which were wont to "set the table on a roar," prove that as was the author such was the man. On all scores, indeed, his mind lay open equally to the ludicrous and the pathetic; he breathed upon both alike, stealing and giving pleasure. Nevertheless he is never seen hunting specially after either, but has a laugh for the one, a sigh for the other, and a voice for both, wherever he meets them. He enters to all appearances into immediate, perfect fellowship with both; recognizes them as parts of himself; delights in the laughable for its own sake, not for his fancied or real superiority to it; and laughs at it, or laughs with it, not sneeringly and spitefully, but genially and lovingly; for it need hardly be said that he saw too deeply into every thing to feel contempt at any thing.

Assuredly this genial, hearty sympathy with the ludicrous is infinitely wiser and better than the self-complacent triumph over it which we sometimes hear praised. To laugh with those that laugh, is nearly or quite as commendable, as to weep with those that weep, and religion requires not so much that we should stop laughing to praise our Maker, as that we should praise Him in our laughter; which we may do by laughing at the right time and place. For there is a time to laugh and a time to weep, a time to sing and a time to dance; all of which are equally good in their place, all equally

bad out of their place; and indeed there are places where it is not right to pray, such as the corner of the streets. The pride that arrays itself against the really laughable, and spurns it, and spits at it, is truly as much more ignoble as it is less delightful than a cordial fellowship with it. I say the *really* laughable; for to laugh at serious and sacred things, or to attempt turning them into ridicule, is alike presumptive of a wicked heart and a weak head. The vaunt of a certain scoffing persifleur, that with six witticisms a day he would banish from the world the Author of our religion, was doubtless one of the most wretched and most contemptible things ever uttered anywhere. Such sneerings of conceited sciolism are probably the sweetest incense that Satan ever snuffs up from the altar of a fool's heart!

- “ Know that pride,
- Howe’er disguised in its own majesty,
Is littleness; that he who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used; that thought with him
Is in its infancy. The man whose eye
Is ever on himself doth look on one,
The least of nature’s works, one who might move
The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
Unlawful ever. O be wiser, thou!
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love;
True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.”

The accomplished author of Philip Van Artevelde very justly and beautifully says,

“Where sorrow’s held intrusive and turned out,
True wisdom will not enter, nor true power,
Nor aught that dignifies humanity.”

The same thing may be said with almost equal truth of humour. The perpetual, barren simper, indeed, which we sometimes see, how fair soever may be the outward show, is doubtless proof of the most loathsome inward disease. Perpetual smiles are of course seldom genuine ones. Those who wear them are generally too selfish and hollow-hearted to sympathize with the laughable, or with any thing else indeed but their own selfish purposes. The smiles of such people are to be shunned like the fascinations of a serpent. But a downright, hearty, spontaneous laugh in the right place and right time, is probably the best symptom one can have of inward spiritual health. The case of that man’s heart, however enveloped in infirmities, and how spongy soever in places the rind may be, is sound. He has a feeling, a sympathy for something besides himself. There are no thorns growing out in his hand; no daggers sprouting forth on his tongue! Such a man may be safely trusted. On the other hand, we may almost say the man that has no humour in his soul, and is not moved by mirth’s spontaneous gush,

“Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils :
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus :
Let no such man be trusted.”

Shakspeare’s boundless love of innocent mirth; his inexhaustible child-like cheerfulness and playfulness; the facility and felicity with which he sympathetically

identified himself with the laughable, virtuously and chastely married himself to it ;—in a word, that he was a man of infinite jest and humour, is truly one of the most touching beauties of his character, and one of the most instructive as well as most entertaining qualities of his works. It has more hygean properties than half the drugs we take ! I wonder physicians do not oftener prescribe his works, as I know they sometimes do.

SENSIBILITY.

SHAKSPEARE'S sensibility is in proportion with his other gifts. His heart is as great and as strong as his head. He feels the beauty and the worth of things as truly and as deeply as he discerns their relations ; is alive to the slightest and equal to the strongest impression ; nothing stuns and nothing eludes his sensibility. He sympathizes, calmly yet intensely, with all that he finds and all that he makes ; he *loves* all things ; his soul gushes out in warm virgin-like affection over all the objects of his contemplation, and embraces them in its soft, heavenly radiance. He discerns a soul, a pulse of good even in things that are evil ; knows, indeed, that nothing can exist utterly divorced from good of some sort ; that it must have some inward harmony to hold it in existence. To this harmony, this innate, indestructible worth, his mind is ever open. He is, therefore, a man of universal benevolence ; wishes well of all things ; will do his best to benefit them ; not, indeed, by injuring others, but by doing them justice ; by giving them their due, be they saints, or be they sinners. He

is strictly and inexorably impartial, and even shows his love of perfect justice by shedding the sunshine and the rain of his genius alike on the just and on the unjust. For his feelings are the allies, not the rivals, of his other powers; exist in sympathy and reciprocity, not in antagonism with them, and therefore never try to force or tempt him from his loyalty to truth.

With most men, the head and heart will not work together; one of them is always pulling the other under: in thinking, they cease to feel, or in feeling they cease to think; so that, to borrow a figure from Coleridge, they are either like the moon, all light and no heat, or like a stove, all heat and no light. They therefore fail of true wisdom, because they are always using either the head without the heart, or the heart without the head. Shakspeare, on the contrary, everywhere exemplifies "the long pull, and strong pull, and pull altogether," of all the faculties. Thought and feeling with him are always interpenetrating and interworking, and he never fails of wisdom, because he never uses head or heart alone. Notwithstanding, forasmuch as Shakspeare discovers no preference of the good characters to the bad, many think him deficient in moral sensibility; whereas, in fact, he shows the perfection of such sensibility in altogether preferring truth to them both: for there is really nothing more vicious or more vitiating than, what some people seem greatly in love with, the attempting to teach better morality than is taught by nature and Providence.

There is more, I suspect, in this matter of feeling than is generally supposed. Many people seem to have no true feelings whatever, but only sensations, which they

mistake for feelings. And of the remaining portion, perhaps a majority have no feelings but of and for themselves. Like amiable sheep, they love the good shepherd only *because* he leads them into green pastures and beside the still waters. It is to be feared that even some Christians love pleasure more than they love truth; and would tell a world of lies to escape pain. If assured that Satan, though they know him the father of lies, would make them happy, there is no telling whom they would follow. Such people cannot be said to feel truth at all; nay, they can hardly be said to feel any thing save themselves; and their apparent sympathy for other things is really but a feeling of themselves or their interest in them; that is, it is but self-love diverted upon another object. There are, however, a few men, and perhaps Shakspeare stands at their head, who truly sympathize with something out of themselves; who really feel the true, the beautiful, and the good; nay, whose feeling of these objects comparatively swallows up the feeling of themselves. Shakspeare, it is true, did not talk about his feelings, perhaps was not conscious of them; but that he had them in their truest, deepest form, seems highly probable from the fact, that instead of speaking about *them*, he spoke about the things that inspired them. His love of the true, the beautiful, and the good, was simply too deep and genuine, to be listening to its own voice, or carrying a looking-glass before itself to gaze at its own image; and such is ever the case with souls that are smitten with such objects. For it is the very nature of true feeling to interest us in something out of ourselves. And when we see a man prating about his feelings, we

may know at once that he has none. In a word, it is with feeling as with religion ; if a man really have any, he will have "none to speak of." Of all men, therefore, Shakspeare was perhaps the least a sentimentalist ; strove not at all to reveal the truth and beauty of his feelings, but only to reveal the truth and beauty which he felt. For the sentimentalist is one who thinks he has very fine feelings and means every body shall know it : he therefore puts his feelings on the outside, dresses himself in them, and so goes about calling on all to observe and admire them ; all of which, by the way, is among the very lowest and meanest forms of conceit and selfishness.

Nor are Shakspeare's moral sympathies, his sympathy with truth and good, any more just or genuine than his mere human sympathies. He not only knows what we all know, but feels what we all feel, and utters forth the feeling with the same fidelity as he does the knowledge. The hearts of most men are so small, that they cannot fully enter into the feelings of another without ceasing to be themselves ; a complete sympathy with the movements of another mind would perhaps swallow up the individuality of their own. But Shakspeare's all-embracing bosom catches and reverberates every note of man's heart. He could reproduce in their utmost depth and intensity the feelings of us all without injury to himself. His sympathies seem to have covered the extremes of human sensibility, so that the feelings of us all might, as it were, be cut out of his, and yet leave his personality entire.

Doubtless it was this omniformity of feeling, as much as any thing, that qualified him, beyond any other man,

to be the representative of the whole human family. He was thus in a condition neither to withhold from a character his own, nor to yield him up another's, but simply to give him his due. Hence the strict rigid impartiality of his representations; for among all his characters, we cannot discover from the delineation itself that he had a single favourite, though of course we cannot conceive it possible for any man to regard Edmund and Edgar, for example, with the same feelings. It is as if the scenes of his dramas were forced on his observation against his will; himself, meanwhile, being under the most solemn oath to report the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Surrounded by the angels and demons which make up the dramatic combination of *Lear* or *Othello*, though conscious the while of their inmost thoughts and feelings, such, nevertheless, is the calmness, with which he surveys them, that not the least bias comes in to distort or discolour his representation of them. He thus uniformly leaves the characters to make their own impression upon us; has no opinions or feelings of his own to promulgate through them, but simply to represent them; in a word, he is their mouth-piece, not they his; and he could be the representative of all because he would be the advocate of none. With the honour or shame, the right or wrong of their actions, he has nothing to do; that they are so and act so, is their fault, not his; and his business is, not to reform nor deprave, to censure nor approve them, but simply to tell the truth about them, whithersoever it may lead him. Accordingly, he exhibits neither any utterly worthless, nor any utterly faultless monsters; none too good or too bad to exist;

none too high to be loved, or too low to be pitied : even his worst characters (unless we except those two she-tigers, Goneril and Regan, and even their blood is red like ours) have some slight fragrance of humanity about them ; some indefinable touches which redeem them from utter hatred or utter contempt, and keep them within the pale of human sympathy, or at least of human pity.

Nor does Shakspeare ever bring in any characters as the mere shadows, or instruments, or appendages of others. All the persons, great and small, contain within themselves the reason why they are there and not elsewhere, why they are so and not otherwise. None exist exclusively for others, or exclusively for themselves, but all appear, partly on their own account, with aims, and feelings, and interests of their own. None are forced in merely to supply the place of others, and so merely trifled with till the others can be got ready to resume their place ; but each is treated in his turn as if he were the main character in the piece, and speaks and acts, not merely to call up and call out others, but chiefly to utter and impart himself. So true is this, that even when one character comes in as the satellite of another, he does so by a right and an impulse of his own ; he is all the while but obeying or rather executing the law of his personality, and has just as much claim on the other for a primary, as the other has on him for a satellite. In a word, Shakspeare, in his mental kingdom, is a prince of absolute power, but at the same time of absolute justice, and always treats those of his subjects as the mightiest who are at the moment beneath his pen : he knows no weighty man,

or rather knows no man whatever in his empire, save him who is now speaking, and knows him as such, or even at all, only while he permits him to speak. The consequence of which is, that all the characters are developed, not indeed at equal length, for they have not all the same amount to be developed, but with equal perfectness as far as they go; for to make the dwarf fill the same space as the giant, would be to dilute, not develope the dwarf.

Thus with the fruitfulness of nature Shakspeare also joined the disinterestedness of nature, who concentrates herself alike in the nettle and the oak, the night-shade and the rose, the wasp and the dove. And perhaps his greatest glory, both as a poet and as a man is, that he was no respecter of sects, or parties, or persons, but simply a teller of the truth.

“Born for the universe, he shrunk not his mind,
Nor to party gave up what was meant for mankind.”

He was neither Jew nor Gentile, Romanist nor Protestant, but a broad, Christian, Catholic union of them all, and threw the mantle of his genius round our universal humanity. Hence his works are always humanizing us, fusing our minds, so to speak, out of their selfish isolation, into unanimity and fellowship; in a word, they are a constant discipline of humanity, are filled with those “touches of nature,” which “make the whole world kin:” at the voice of his genius the shell of individualism, into which we are so fond of retiring to “suck the paws of our own self-importance,” is perpetually giving way to the ingress and egress of human sympathy.

thy. He seems indeed to have lived and worked altogether at the roots of humanity, distilling the very sap and moulding the very elements of the wonderful structure; and knew that all sects and parties were but the transient, differently-shaped leaves which the winds of time would soon blow into oblivion, while the structure itself would remain forever the same.

This universal and impartial humanity is doubtless among the highest qualities of Shakspeare's works; nay, it is among the highest possible qualities of any human productions; for it is the union and interfusion of the deepest reason and the justest feeling. The great trouble, I suspect, with most of us, is, that we dwell wholly or mostly in mere conventionalities, and personal or party peculiarities. The moment we attempt of ourselves to go out of these, we get lost amid perplexities and darkness. The result is, we are continually mistaking and substituting our individual impressions for universal truth; assuming that all people are bound to think as we think, feel as we feel, and see as we see, and concluding them very weak or very wicked, unless their opinions and feelings coincide with ours. Within the circle, indeed, of their own conventionalities, men often attain a sort of profundity; but in proportion as they become profound there, they of course become unintelligible or uninteresting to those beyond their convention. Floating merely amid some local accidents of humanity, they are therefore intelligible to, and intelligent of, those only who are within the circle of the same accidents; but should they dive to the universal attributes of humanity, they would at once become intelligible to, and intelligent of, all. Hence Shakspeare's

works, the profoundest of all uninspired writings, are at the same time the most generally intelligible. Striking below the accidents of local and partial nature, he is constantly touching chords that vibrate through the universal mind of man. So exquisitely balanced were his powers, that his individual impressions coincided with universal truth, or at least instinctively adjusted themselves to it. He could, therefore, frame laws which should embrace the whole human family, instead of framing them for a particular section of mankind, and then pronouncing all others outlaws. He could not only see that others were wrong, but could see why they were wrong; why, in fact, from the constitution or condition of their minds, they could not be otherwise: he could therefore appreciate and sympathize with them, notwithstanding their errors; and, what is better, by making them known to each other and themselves, he could do something towards setting them right. Occupying, as it were, the focal point of nature, where the various coloured rays of partial truth meet and blend together into the pure white light of universal truth, he could throw them back in their integral perfection; thus giving us, along with the part of truth which we already have, and which is coloured simply because it is a part, the transparent, colourless whole which we want. If, however, we study him, as many do, with prismatic minds, we shall of course again refract the beams from him into particoloured rays, and so approve him when we find him with us, and censure him when we find him against us. But such is not the way to study him, nor, indeed, any other author worth

the studying; unless, perchance, we study rather to teach him than to be taught by him.

It is for these reasons, in part, that Shakspeare's characters always affect us as those in real life. Different people, according to their respective feelings and dispositions, take up very different impressions of them. As in the case of actual persons, nothing short of a profound and subtile analysis can arrive at satisfactory conclusions respecting them. To a constant, reflecting student, they seem perpetually developing themselves, and are always undergoing apparent modifications precisely corresponding to the real modifications of the student's own character. Often they are so much addressed to the feelings, so much more is often suggested than is said, that no one can fully expound them, without completely unfolding himself. Always making the persons act and speak from what is implied, as well as from what is disclosed, the poet is perpetually sending us beyond himself to nature, and to the elements of all character. Even when the characters are seen but in part, they are yet capable of being understood and unfolded in the whole; every part being relative and inferring all the others. What is given, be it ever so little, conveys a relish of what is withheld, be it ever so much. In short, as every part of a good architectural design implies and infers the whole structure to which it belongs; so in one of Shakspeare's persons every act or word, being a result of the whole character, is significant and suggestive of the whole; involves, indeed, the seminal principle out of which the whole proceeds; and therefore supplies at once the subject

and the stimulant of long meditation; contains both matter and motive for an indefinite period of thought.

From what hath been said, the perceptive, the creative, and the sensitive powers were so exquisitely balanced in Shakspeare's mind, that it is impossible to say which had the lead. That he indefinitely surpassed all other writers in something, is generally allowed; but in what particular faculty or mental activity his great superiority lay, scarce any two are agreed. And this very circumstance is probably decisive of the truth. The real secret of his superiority to all other writers, lies in his having in the highest degree the peculiar faculties of each. It is the absence of any individual preponderance or individual deficiency among his powers, that forms their united perfection; and his towering so far above the rest of mankind is sufficiently explained by the fact, that no one of his faculties towered above the others. There seems to have been an exact proportion, and equivalence, and reciprocity among all his powers, so that they worked and played together in perfect, perpetual harmony, without ever deciding, or even raising the question of precedence among themselves. In a word, the peculiarity of his mind consists in its want of peculiarities; its generic quality; its power of communicating equally with all other minds; so that "he was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men." Accordingly, wisdom, true wisdom, in the best and highest sense, seems to me the characteristic quality of his works. It is for this reason that one has to look at Shakspeare so long in order to realize his greatness; the exquisite proportion and harmony of his

mind causing him to appear at first much smaller than he is.

Perhaps I cannot better close this view of Shakspeare's mind, than in the enthusiastic words of Schlegel. "This tragical Titan," says he, "who storms the heavens, and threatens to tear the world off its hinges; who, more fruitful than Eschylus, makes our hair to stand on end, and congeals our blood with horror, possessed at the same time the insinuating loveliness of the sweetest poetry; he plays with love like a child, and his songs are breathed out like melting sighs. He unites in his existence the utmost elevation and the utmost depth; the most foreign, and even apparently irreconcilable properties, in him subsist peaceably together. The world of spirits and of nature have laid their treasures at his feet: in strength a demi-god, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom a protecting spirit of a higher order, he lowers himself to mortals as if unconscious of his superiority, and is as open and unassuming as a child."

ALLEGED IMMORALITY.

SHAKSPEARE's plays have been frequently charged with immoral tendencies; than which a more unfounded and injurious charge could not well be made. Like various other charges visited upon them, it has generally sprung either from a disposition to fix upon certain detached expressions, or from inability to take in the impression of a vital, organic whole. For morally, as otherwise, a work of art should be regarded in its total impression;

and those who can see but one line or one sentence of a poem at once are not competent judges of its moral quality. Undoubtedly there are passages in Shakspeare's works, as indeed there are in the Bible itself, which, taken by themselves, may produce a bad effect; but there cannot be found a whole play, scarcely even a whole scene in them, whose integral impression is not altogether good. There is indeed no flower so pure and sweet but that certain reptiles will extract poison from it; even the wisest provisions of nature and the sacredest transanctions of life, beauty, innocence, marriage, become to some minds the food of base, sensual desires. I have known certain lewd epicures of sin take the Bible of a Sunday, when they could not well engage in any sweeter wickedness, and glut their spirits out of its pages. What, in the name of purity, is there in the universe so pure but that such minds would draw impurity from it? Why, they would taint the very heavens themselves, and then suck back the corruption they had engendered!

It must be confessed, however, that Shakspeare's own virtue, like that of his purest characters, and like that of the purest men too, was not of that ambitious, pharisaical sort, which is always trying to bolster itself by an outrageous horror of vice, or at least the appearance of vice. Accordingly he never attires sensuality in artificial attractions, nor conceals real impurity under a wrappage of conventional decency, nor throws the drapery of affected delicacy over the movements of guilty passion. If he has occasion for a bad character, he shows him just as he is, and does not attempt to disguise his grossness, or palliate his deformity; and it is

surely our own fault if we are captivated by the inward impurity of a character whose outward ugliness ought to offend even our senses. He has sometimes delineated downright villains and sensualists ; but he has never volunteered to steal the robes of heaven for them to serve the devil in without offending decency. In all cases, indeed, he has most religiously kept faith with the moral sensibilities which nature has set to guard the purity of the mind, and he seldom violates even the laws of gentility save in obedience to the higher laws of morality. It is by gilding or varnishing over impurity with the superficial graces of style and sentiment, by wrapping up poison in an envelope of honey, so that it may steal a passage into the mind without offending the taste, or alarming the moral sentinels of the heart,—it is in this way that death is conveyed into the system ;—a thing which no man was ever farther from doing than Shakespeare : if we wish to see it done in perfection, we had better go to the pages of Byron and Bulwer ; who do indeed discover no little fondness for delineating noble, generous, magnanimous villains ; gentle, amiable, sentimental cut-throats,—in a word, devils sugared over. Yet it is questionable whether even these, bad as they are, are so bad as the late importations from France, so much in favor with the more “ beautiful spirits ” of the time, where the laws of morality are not so much evaded by simulation of virtue as inverted by consecration of vice, and where debauchery is argued for on principles of reason, and religion itself, the sacred law of love, is urged in behalf of lewdness and lust. The truth is, there are some people whose morality seems to be all in their ears ; who cannot bear to have things called by

their right names ; nay, who are even fond of dirty things, and will compass sea and land to come at them, provided they can have them dressed in clean words ; and who are never contented unless they have something whereby to persuade themselves that they are serving God while indulging their lusts.

In Shakspeare, as in nature, virtue shows her finest lessons in contest, or in contrast with vice : if we reject the former and cleave to the latter, the fact proves our impurity, not his ; and if we are corrupted by such teachings, it were surely hard to tell what can purify us. He who forsakes Isabella to follow after Angelo, or Desdemona to follow after Iago, may be justly given up as already a spoiled egg. Under objections to such exhibitions there is often concealed a grossly impure mind, and he who goes among such examples scenting out corruption and letting loose his censure, only shows the drift of his thoughts. Such a quick susceptibility of vicious impressions often cloaks itself under a formal or verbal austerity. He who most delights to meet vice in secret, will of course be most apt to recognize and turn his back upon her in public. His fig-leaves betray him. It is the presence of powder only that makes the torch dangerous.

“ So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.”

In heaven's name let decency be preserved, but let it not be piled on in folds and bustles to cover up personal deformity ! Obscenity is certainly bad enough, but it is infinitely better than the chaste language of a crafty

seducer. It is always well for us to know whom we are with ; and our best safeguard against vice, is the very indecency in which it naturally appears. In his uniform observance of these principles Shakspeare has shown a degree of moral purity of which we have few examples in literature. He is indeed sometimes gross, but never false ; he may occasionally offend a sense of delicacy, but never deceives and seduces the mind into admiration of unworthy objects ; and he carries on no warfare against virtue by endeavoring to entrap our sympathies by the misfortunes of vice. That he should make a Falstaff at once so delightful and so detestable ; that he should so charm us with the humour, even while disgusting us with the sensuality of such a being, and so let us into the truth, without drawing us into the love of such a character ; really proves the strength of his morality no less than the mastery of his genius. For my part, I dare be known to think Shakspeare's works a far better school of virtuous discipline than half the moral and religious books which are now put into the hands of youth, and of which the chief tendency seems to be, to keep them thinking continually how wise and good they are ; thus dyeing them in the wool with the conceit of virtue and the cant of pietism, and laying the foundations either of spiritual pride or of rotten-hearted libertinism, in an intensely self-conscious and self-admiring morality.

Shakspeare, it is true, never lays off the poet to put on the moralist ; never goes out of his way to inculcate morality in an abstract, scientific form. He does not anatomize virtue, to make us skilful casuists and dialecticians. Of that arrogant but impotent science which is

always telling us what to do, but never inspiring us to do it, and which, beginning at the understanding, tries to work inwards, but never gets at the heart, he did not aspire to be a teacher. Morality comes from him as from nature, not in abstract propositions, to set our logic-mills a-going, but in a living form of beauty, to inspire us with love and noble passion. Of which method we have a beautiful example in the sweet Psalmist of Israel, who, when he found King Saul possessed by the evil spirit, took his harp and voice, and with his heavenly minstrelsy charmed the evil spirit out of him, and restored him to reason. Probably if David had undertaken to reason the devil out, he would only have strengthened the possession; for the devil, then as now, was a most expert logician, but could not stand a divine song.

Attempts enough have been made to countervail bad passions with intellectual convictions; such passions can be successfully countervailed only by awakening antagonist good passions: and herein lies the peculiar force and beauty of passion, that it represents the object as of infinite value, and so admits no selfish or prudential considerations against it. The trouble with us, is not so much a want of knowledge, as a want of love:

“We see the right, but still the wrong pursue,”

because we look at the right with the head only, not with the heart. What we need, therefore, is the creative faculty to imagine that which we know, and the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; in a word, we want the poetry of life, to make us feel and love the lessons which are everywhere written around

and within us—lessons whose soft but irresistible appeals to the heart have been so long drowned in the logical hubbub with which science has vainly striven, and must always vainly strive, to rectify the heart through the understanding. The truth is, the process of rectification, as a certain old-fashioned Book tells us, must begin at the heart, and work the other way. This creative faculty, this generous impulse, is what Shakspeare will give us, if we be worthy to receive it. He is really the better moralist inasmuch as he never attempts to moralize. For our moral sensibilities are the most delicate elements of our constitution, and require to be touched with the utmost care, or rather, not to be touched directly at all; and if instruction be forced upon them, and crammed into them, it dulls and deadens, instead of quickening and strengthening them. It is worse than useless to feed them before they are hungry, and to anticipate the appetite with a glut is not the way to sharpen it. Hence it is, that those teachers who are always thrusting morality into the faces of their pupils, and boring them with it, and requiring them formally to study it, so seldom get them to practise it. Perhaps nothing is more common among us, than to stuff and cram people into a sort of moral dyspepsia. In a word, the true secret of success in moral instruction, is that very remoteness and reserve which distinguishes art from all other forms of expression, and which makes it as much more effective than science as example is better than precept. Moreover, by drawing the mind out of itself, and absorbing it in external objects, art instils right sentiments and principles into us without letting us know it; so that we may become virtuous, without the liability to

turn our virtue into a source of moral pride and conceit, those darling vices of the age.

It should not be supposed, however, that Shakspeare is a suitable book for all readers. Probably there is no book whatsoever, whereof this can be justly affirmed. It is an old maxim, that what is one man's food is another man's poison. Whether, or how far this be physically true, I cannot say; that it is true morally and intellectually, need not be doubted. Unless we carry certain dispositions of mind and heart to the Bible even, we are liable to be injured rather than benefited by it; and it is to be feared that many have been led to eat and drink of its contents unworthily, by those who were too ambitious of doing good, to wait for proper times and occasions. In education, whether moral or intellectual, every thing depends upon wisely varying and adapting our means according to each particular subject; regard must be continually had to the special wants, conditions, inclinations, and aptitudes of individual minds, and to treat all alike, is simply to mistreat all. The wise physician is he who carefully observes and studies the peculiarities of each particular case, and frames his prescriptions accordingly; and to proceed on general prescriptions, we all understand to be quackery. The great fault in the teaching of the day is, that teachers' minds are so clogged with generalities, that they have no attention to bestow on the specialities before them. Confident in their knowledge of all, they omit to study each, and so go on *generalizing* their pupils into ignorance and imbecility. In short, babes, whether in the cradle or in the counting-room, require to be fed with milk; whereas Shakspeare is

strong meat. Albeit, therefore, he is not good for all, there is no danger of his hurting any one who can truly understand him; that is, who can see particular passages in relation to the characters whence they proceed, and particular characters in relation to the others with whom they are associated.

Another item in the attempted impeachment of Shakspeare's morality is, that he does not always observe, nay, sometimes utterly disregards what are termed the laws of poetical justice; that in his exhibitions moral equity is, to say the least, but very imperfectly administered, often, indeed, not administered at all. He does not encourage virtue by making it always successful, nor discountenance vice by always defeating its aims. In short, a degree of moral confusion reigns in his plays; the innocent often fall under the machinations of the guilty; the guilty often triumph on the ruins of innocence; often both are hurried away in undistinguishable ruin.

Fortunately for Shakspeare's honour, this charge cannot be denied. This rigid dispensation of moral justice, which brings virtue and vice down to a calculation of profit and loss, however favourable it might have been to his popularity, would have been fatal to his morality. And is the not succeeding, the not getting our wages, the worst thing we fear? Most assuredly, then, it is not the worst we shall suffer, and ought to suffer. If we would not rather die as Desdemona than live and thrive as Iago, the more pity for us, and the more punishment for us too. We have ourselves lived to see virtue well-nigh banished from the fireside, and religion from the altar, by the perverse efforts of certain teach-

ers to make out a balance of worldly motives in their favour. And how many such appeals to the selfishness of men do they think it will take to make men disinterested? Such attempts to reconcile or identify interest and duty, only encourage men to seek their interest under the mask of duty; that is, to add hypocrisy to selfishness. Conflicts of interest and duty are the very means whereby Providence tests, and enables us to test what and where our treasures are, what and where our hearts are. Truth and virtue never offer to compromise with us; to insure us success in return for our homage: lest they should make us hirelings, not subjects, they promise us simply themselves; and it is that old serpent, the devil, that promises us thrones, and kingdoms, and fat purses and fine stomachs, if we will but fall down and worship him.

The truth is, we might just about as well go into chaos in quest of harmony, as go into the present order of things in quest of moral equity. And Shakspeare knew very well,—what some wise moralists seem never to have dreamed of,—that the virtue which springs from anticipations of success, was but the offspring of Satan and selfishness; and that, standing on calculations of profit and loss, it must fall, as it deserves to fall, into the pit. Every body that has half an eye knows the rewards of this world are often obtained without being merited, and often merited without being obtained; that it is characteristic of the good, to avert evil from the bad by sacrificing themselves, and of the bad, to save themselves by diverting evil upon the good. The poetry, therefore, or the philosophy which represents virtue and vice as sure of present recompense, is a lie, and as

such can only come directly or indirectly, of the father of lies. And Shakspeare was just as far from stealing the robes of Satan to serve heaven in, as from stealing the robes of heaven to serve Satan in. Accordingly, he gave his characters, good and bad, a sphere wherein to develop themselves, and then dismissed them, as nature and as God dismisses them, into a higher order of things, to receive their reward or suffer their retribution.

There is a deal of strange theology or antitheology in the world touching the question of happiness. "O happiness, our being's end and aim," says one; and many there be, who seriously maintain that happiness is the highest thing we are able to seek or required to seek. In keeping with this notion, the desire of happiness is set forth as the most original and fundamental law of our nature; one which we cannot escape from if we would, and ought not to escape from if we could. Now, I undertake to say, we have no such original desire whatever, unless as implied in original sin; that it is altogether a fallen desire; one which we ought not to act from at all, and which, God helping us, we need not act from. The truth is, happiness is in no wise a legitimate object of pursuit, though various things producing it are. Properly speaking, there is, and can be, no such thing as *love* of happiness: for happiness is altogether an inward, subjective thing, whereas *love* is essentially an objective sentiment; a sentiment inspired by something external to the mind; and the moment love takes happiness for its object, it degenerates into lust. For to love a thing only for the pleasure we may have of it, is the very definition of lust. Happiness, happiness, what

does the word mean? Happiness, one would really think, is a thing that *happens*; a thing, too, that will not be, unless allowed to happen; so that seeking it, working for it, is the surest way to prevent its happening. There are, indeed, various susceptibilities within us, and various objects around us, answering to them; in the lawful pursuit of which objects, happiness overtakes us, falls upon us, *happens* to us, without our knowing it or before we know it; whereas the moment we go after it, we lose it, because we forsake the objects that give it. Such, as appears from the original of the word, and as all men's experience will testify, is the beautiful provision of nature, that, relatively to us, the thing called happiness must emphatically happen, else it cannot be; as if our Maker would have us owe all our happiness to Him, and so had empowered and instructed us simply to do our duty, reserving to Himself alone the power to make us happy in doing it.

On the whole, therefore, perhaps we may as well let alone our emotions; forget that we have any in the objects that inspire them; love, and seek those objects, instead of loving and seeking ourselves in them; and be happy in loving and seeking them, without knowing or caring whether we be happy or not. For it is not by love of salvation, but by love of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that we are to be saved. In chasing the butterfly, it is not happiness, but simply the butterfly, that the child is in quest; were he seeking happiness, he would probably leave the butterfly and go to chasing sin, as the rest of us generally do, in quest of it. I know it may be urged, that happiness comes by self-sacrifice; and thus do the advocates of the the-

ology in question, always contrive to escape among the coincidences of things. But does it follow that seeking after happiness will lead to self-sacrifice? The mischief of such teaching is, that it encourages self-sacrifice *in order to* happiness, which of course is no self-sacrifice at all. Doubtless, the profit and loss morality, so often urged against Shakspeare, is connected, either as cause or effect, with this shallow and impudent theology.

LECTURE III.

CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAKSPEARE'S AGE—CONDITIONS AND RESOURCES OF GENIUS—NATURE AND OBJECT OF ART.

My last lecture was mainly devoted to an exposition of what I conceived to be the faculties, the processes, and the qualities of Shakspeare's mind. The remainder of the course will be occupied with general discussions on art, and with particular analyses of the poet's works. I trust, however, it will not be deemed inappropriate, first to take a brief view of the characters and characteristics of his age. This may help to remove some misconceptions and obscurations, and thus open for us a clearer view, not only of Shakspeare, but into the whole region of modern art.

There has been, and perhaps still is, a very general impression in certain high places, that Shakspeare was the creature of a rude age, and therefore the creator of rude though wonderful productions. Indeed the rudeness of his age, and the rudeness of his works, have been alternately used as premise and conclusion; each has in turn been assumed, and then the other inferred from it. "Born in a rude age," says Mr. Hume, "and educated in the lowest manner, he was without any instruction, either from the world or from books;" and this oracular criticism has been echoed and re-echoed so many times,

in one form or another, that it is now known to be but the reflection of a voice, and is fast echoing itself into silence. Now, with submission to Mr. Hume and the school he represents, there is not a word of truth in this statement whatever; and his subsequent remark, that Shakspeare "cannot, for any length of time, uphold a reasonable propriety of thought," whether it be viewed as bearing the relation of premise or conclusion to the former, has just as much truth, and just as much want of truth, as its fellow.

Hume, though but a half-man, was probably a sincere one; and I know not whether it be more incredible, that he should say what he did not believe, or that he should believe what he said. But he seems to have been born and educated on purpose to write metaphysics and political history. He could doubtless spin theories and narrate facts well enough;—though even here, as Burke says, "he seems to have aimed rather at telling a good story, than at writing a true history;" and therefore often shows more skill in tormenting facts than narrating them;—but in any thing relating to art, or nature, or religion, I do not see how he could possibly tell the truth. Himself a perfect logic-mill, both by nature and discipline, it seems to have been an especial part of his mission, to grind the sceptical consequences out of the then prevailing system of metaphysical philosophy. The taper-light of a closet logic appears to have been "the fountain-light of all his day, the master-light of all his seeing,"—a light which shines well enough in the closet, but which the breath of nature is very apt to blow out. His mind fed almost exclusively on speculative theorems and diagrams; and of these he was a finished epi-

cure. To draw inferences, the premises being given ; to prove that nothing could be proved, seems to have been the chief end of his creation ; and the civil wars are said to have been about the only thing that ever transported him out of the dreamy world of abstractions, in which he lived, and moved, and had his being, into something like epic force and epic clearness of thought and speech. He could doubtless fetch you the leg of a metaphysical notion from the Central-Africa of Duns Scotus or Thomas Aquinas, in the twinkling of an eye ; but he seems never to have gone out of his closet long enough to see what there was in nature, or whether there was any such thing as *nature* at all. Engrossed, like many others of his time, in the abstractions of science, he had neither the imagination to see, nor the genial impulse to feel, the individualities of art. Such men can study art, as they study nature, only in the process of dissection—a process, which of course scares away the very life that makes her nature ; so that they get, after all, but a sort of post-mortem knowledge of her. On the whole, Mr. Hume is a fine exemplification of the truth, that the more we use the head without the heart—the more we speculate without love, or reverence, or religion, the unwiser do we become ; for there is not a single thing of God's or nature's making in the universe, that can be known, or otherwise than misknown, by such a study. The astonishing acuteness, which made Mr. Hume such an exquisite voluptuary among political and metaphysical abstractions, was not unlike those finely-ground telescopes, which disclose spots on the moon. Without the intervention of other faculties, they deceive the mind, even

while assisting the eye ; for they lead it to regard as defects what are really blooming islands, waving forests, laughing valleys, and majestic mountains ; and thus cause it to find fault with the moon for not being a mere dead, perpetual waste of waters ; that is, for not being good for nothing.

Now, to say that Shakspeare's age was a rude age, that it was without true culture, in the best sense of the term, is about as magnificent a piece of historical misrepresentation as can easily be found. It is one of the instances so common in modern times, wherein people have presumed their fathers to have been in the dark, because they have themselves got into the dark respecting their fathers. But, even if it were true, the following assertion, that Shakspeare "was without any instruction either from the world or from books," besides being false in point of fact, betrays a total misconception of the nature of genius, and of the manner and conditions of its development. And the remark, that Shakspeare "cannot, for any length of time, uphold a reasonable propriety of thought," is directly in the teeth of standing facts which all can see and examine for themselves, provided they have eyes. It is truly surprising, that Mr. Hume should have made statements so palpably false ; and can be satisfactorily accounted for only by supposing he had never read Shakspeare at all, nor, indeed, any thing about him, unless, perhaps, the contemptuous and contemptible criticisms of Voltaire. Where, one might ask, does Mr. Hume suppose the world was when Shakspeare wrote ? Or does he suppose the poet had no eyes to read it with ? That were indeed a serious difficulty. How hard it is to read the world with-

out eyes, Mr. Hume himself hath abundantly shown us. Shakspeare, however, probably could not have read any thing to suit Mr. Hume, without a pair of Dellacruscan spectacles ; an article which, fortunately, had not come to be substituted for natural eyes in Shakspeare's time. It has long been the misfortune of a certain class of critics, that, distrusting the visual organs which nature gave them, they have preferred the glass eyes of the schools. Having got these, they might about as well have wooden heads as any, filled with clock-work instead of brains ; and such an establishment, I suspect, would be no very unfit representative of the class of poets who swayed the sceptre of art when Hume wrote : for if ever there was a wooden-headed man, I take it Nahum Tate was one ; nevertheless, he had brains enough, as we shall see hereafter, to *improve* some of Shakspeare's best and greatest works !

But whether Shakspeare had eyes to read nature with, may seem less doubtful to some, than whether Mr. Hume had eyes to read Shakspeare with. Of Shakspeare's book-knowledge I have already remarked, in speaking of his life. That he was a deep and diligent student of books, as far as they were to be had, is evident, in that many of the fables which form the groundwork, or rather, frame-work of his plays, were taken from novels and romances then in circulation ; and his historical dramas prove, not indeed that he had read *more* history, but that he had read it far better than Mr. Hume. If the skilful collection and arrangement of names and dates and events ; in a word, if the dry bones of the past, carefully wired up into an anatomy,—a work done by dissecting the past, not by painting it,—

if this answer the demands of history, Mr. Hume is certainly, much the better historian. But if the perfection of history consist in reanimating those dry bones, and reclothing them with flesh and blood, he is not; for his contributions, masterly as they are in their kind, are almost as destitute of the soul of the past, as Shakspeare's are replete with it. In this matter indeed, to use his own sprightly comparison between Shakspeare and Ben Jonson, he had all the learning which Shakspeare wanted, and wanted all the genius that Shakspeare had.

But Hume's flippancies on this subject, lively as they are, are so extremely untenable, that they can hardly be said, on their own account, to deserve a serious refutation; and my remarks are aimed, not so much at him, as at a style and method of criticism, of which he is rather the exponent than the author, and which is too narrow and mean, not to prevail very extensively with or without his authority. The truth is, Shakspeare had fifty contemporaries, any one of whom would be almost enough to redeem his age from the charge of barbarousness. Apart from his native gifts, Shakspeare himself displays a kind and amount of knowledge, attainable only by observation and intercourse with the world, which would prove his age to have been one of the most cultivated the world has ever seen. How many ideas must there be in circulation; how much culture, and profound culture too, must there be in a nation, before ever the materials of such a language as Shakspeare, or Bacon, or Hooker uses, could exist! Of all modern ages, one would really think the Elizabethan age least obnoxious to the charge of rudeness; the age which originated and perfected the Reformation; an age distin-

guished above all others for munificent patronage of genius; when even the ladies entertained their leisure hours with the masterpieces of Grecian eloquence, and poetry, and philosophy, and spoke the Latin language with almost the fluency of their mother tongue; when the proudest sovereigns prided themselves more on their intellectual gifts and attainments, than on their prerogatives, and even sought honour by corresponding with literary men; and when court, and camp, and drawing-room were alive with emulation in social accomplishments and intellectual graces. It has been often enough said, that Shakspeare's faults were those of his age, but that his excellencies were entirely his own. Critics, therefore, have been studious to multiply the former into decided preponderance over the latter; and yet the very qualities which they have marked as defects, are such as could only spring from an unparalleled luxuriance of intellectual vegetation. Question as we may, disguise it as we can, the fact yet stares us in the face, that this same age is the mould in which all modern science, and literature, and philosophy, able or worthy to live, have shaped, and the mirror in which they have dressed, themselves.

Probably, however, the best refutation of this charge may be found in the leading men of the time; for the charge itself implies, that the great men of an age are its exponents, not its exceptions; that they move *with*, not against its current. But if, on the contrary, such men be rather the antithesis than the synopsis of their age; if they act, not in sympathy, but in antagonism with its spirit; then its rudeness rather argues their refinement; and Shakspeare may be viewed as the oppo-

site of his time. The truth, however, as every body knows, is, that the great men of an age are but its last and highest product; that they are, so to speak, its crowning eclecticism; its finest success in self-evolution; excelling it, therefore, as the flower excels the stalk, which produces and sustains the flower. It was because Shakspeare and his compeers came *of* the age, not to it; because they were native, not exotic to its soil, that the age received them as its thinkers and speakers. That the age, then, found in them its exponents, not its exceptions; that it viewed them as the concentration, not the contradiction of its spirit, is evident in that it gave them its honours and suffrages; that, in a word, it crowned, not crucified them.

Now it so happens, that in the quantity and quality of its great men, its soldiers, and scholars, and statesmen, and poets, and philosophers, the Elizabethan age fills the broadest and brightest page in the world's history. With Howard giving laws to the sea, and Burleigh giving laws to the land, and Coke giving laws to the bench, and Hooker giving laws to the church, and Elizabeth giving laws to them all,—exacting the homage of subjects and receiving the devotion of lovers,—and with Shakspeare giving laws, I might almost say life, to every thing,—reading the brightness and sweetness of his genius in the brightest eyes that ever shone, and the sweetest tongues that ever sung: With Spenser, the soul of romance, giving laws to poetry; at one time inditing state-papers to reform the government and relieve the sufferings of Ireland; at another time, “enforced to sing of knights’ and ladies’ gentle deeds,” cre-

ating and peopling with all sweet sounds and lovely sights the wondrous world of Fairy-land,

“How Una, sad of soul, in sad attire,
The gentle Una, of celestial birth,
To seek her knight went wand’ring o’er the earth ;”—

anon, “recalled from Fairy-land to struggle through dark ways,” pouring forth his rich soul in

“Strains which, sung to any maid,
By such a man in the green shade,
Were perilous to hear :”

With the all-captivating Essex, “the flower of chivalry,” giving laws to knighthood ; the cynosure of Europe, the inspiration of the camp, and the most erect of all the spirits that fell from Elizabeth’s court ; challenging the governors of foreign states to single combat for the honour of his nation and the glory of his sovereign ; rivaling the wonderfulest tales of knight-errantry, by the brilliancy and heroism of his exploits ; and the realities of whose life were as romantic as the wildest fictions of romance itself : With the all-accomplished Sidney, “the flower of courtesy,” giving laws to manners ; literally “the courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s eye, tongue, sword,—the observed of all observers ;” who, like his own ideal character, was “a man of high-erected thoughts, seated in the heart of courtesy,” and had refining fire enough in his soul to burn the cobwebs of barbarism off a whole nation ; now, from his fulness of genius and gentleness building up an Arcadia of love and beauty for no severer eyes than a beloved sister’s ; now, furnishing a

model of philosophic criticism in his Defence of Poesy ; now, a model of patriotic and religious heroism before the walls of Zutphen ; throwing all England into mourning by his early death, and wanting nothing but length of days to have realized the ideal perfection which his nation adored in him : With Raleigh, “ the shepherd of the ocean,” in the universality of his gifts and attainments undertaking almost every thing, and excelling in every thing he undertook ; uniting the functions of the soldier, the sailor, the scholar, the courtier, the orator, the poet, the historian, the philosopher, and furnishing models in them all ; sometimes gallanting her majesty at court levees, sometimes reviewing the queen’s guards, sometimes giving chase to a Spanish galleon ; then astonishing Parliament with his eloquence, or instructing it with his wisdom ; then bestriding the Atlantic in quest of Virginia wonders and American Eldorados ; then again murmuring his sweet love-songs too near the ears of one of her majesty’s maids of honour ; and soon afterwards enriching his solitude with the treasures of antiquity, comparing tomes of classic lore, and shedding the wealth of his genius over the field of universal history : And, finally, with Bacon, jurist, statesman, and philosopher, giving laws to science ; rich with the fruits of all past and the germs of all future discoveries ; sweeping round the whole circle of human knowledge, and carrying a torch into every walk of life and every department of thought ; with a mind at once the most comprehensive and the most microscopic, capable alike of dilating itself to the largest surveys, and of contracting itself to the minutest details, so that the greatest things did not exceed his grasp, nor the smallest

elude his search ; sometimes extricating the principles of law and equity from the rubbish of accumulated proscription, sometimes turning Parliament round his finger by the brilliancy of his wit and the profundity of his wisdom, sometimes stooping to order and adjust the pomp and circumstance of official masquerade ; now soaring aloft in the purest regions of contemplation, now exploring some hidden mystery of nature, now stretching out his vision over the universe of thought, and now, alas for human frailty ! stretching out his hand to take a gift ; and who, with his heart enthralled to worldly honours, and his head lost in the heavens, and his brows enwreathed with sunbeams, and the genius of truth sporting round his temples, and the intellectual graces blushing out upon his lips, from the prison which only fettered his body to set free his mind, poured forth those wonderful lucubrations which fell upon the world like an apocalypse of nature, and from which sprung up the golden exhalations of a new intellectual morning : To say nothing of Chapman, the re-writer of Homer, and not so much his translator as his rival ; or of Burbage, the Garrick of his time, and inferior to his illustrious successor in fortune rather than in merit ; or of Camden, the ripe scholar and accomplished historian, whose works Hume himself admits to be among the best historical productions in the language ; or of a host of lesser lights, who would have been reckoned suns in almost any other age :—If, with all these riches growing up spontaneously from the general soil of the national mind ;—if, I say, with all these riches, Shakspeare's age be chargeable with rudeness, what, in the name of Mr. Hume, may civilization and refinement be worth !

The truth is, the ages of Pericles, of Augustus, and of Leo, all together, can hardly show so much wealth of genius and of culture, as the single age of Elizabeth. It was, so to speak, a perfect volcanic eruption of every order of talent, of every kind and degree of intellectual excellence. Or rather, it was the Sabbath of Christendom, when the fierce stormful elements of Mediæval chaos first appeared in a beautiful and beneficent creation, and the genius of modern civilization, resting from his long labours, first smiled upon the works of his hands. Uniting faith without superstition, and philosophy without scepticism, it seems to have had all the grace of art without its stiffness, all the sincerity of youth without its ignorance, and all the enthusiasm of chivalry without its extravagance. This flowerage of so many centuries of preparation, this bursting forth of the bloom and perfume which had been accumulating for ages, had neither the twilight rudeness nor the midday sultriness, but simply the morning freshness of modern civilization; the freshness, too, of a morning sparkling with dew and vocal with songs, as if the star-beams of the preceding night had been fashioning themselves into music and gems; a morning crowned with all the brightness, yet free from all the languor of the day which hath since followed.

But the characteristics of this age, compared with those of a later age, will doubtless justify me in remarking here, that there is a wide distinction between civilization and culture. Culture deals altogether with the inward, spiritual man, and shapes his character; civilization deals only with the outward, formal man, and shapes his condition. The former unfolds and per-

fects what is within us; the latter collects and appropriates what is around us. Culture, therefore, looks to roundness and completeness of individual development; it is, for most part, a matter of personal achievement, wherein each must labour for himself; and begins and perfects itself in the same minds. Civilization, on the other hand, looks to the discovery and diffusion of social and public conveniences. It is the result of united effort, wherein each labours for all, and all labour for each; and is therefore progressive from generation to generation, through an indefinite series of successive improvements. Thus culture develops the inventive faculties, and creates the sciences; civilization multiplies copies of existing inventions, and applies the sciences to practical purposes. In a word, culture produces souls; civilization produces rail-roads, steam-engines, and cotton-mills;—very good things, indeed, but not quite so good as souls; nay, there must first be souls to produce even these.

It is plain, then, that culture must precede and produce civilization. The former has to grow the crop, so to speak, out of which the latter weaves its fabrics. Nevertheless, the crop remains after the fertility is exhausted; the inventions abide after the inventive faculties have died out. So far, therefore, are cultivation and civilization from necessarily advancing together, hand in hand, that the one may even end where the other begins. For the very growing of the crop, especially if it be excessive, may exhaust the productive power; and even if this be not the case, the manufacturing of the crop may divert the energies from the work of cultivation. To change the figure, a great accumulation of gifts

very naturally leads us to dispense with the exalted but difficult excellencies that produced them; as the son often becomes idle and profligate out of the fruits of his father's industry and temperance. Invention is not apt to thrive in the absence of necessity, its mother; and numerous facilities for riding are apt to diminish the power of walking. We may indeed build cisterns of almost any form and size, but we cannot possibly turn them into springs; nay, if we build a cistern high enough over a spring, we may even choke down and drown out the spring, and thus accumulate so much water as to spoil the whole of it. Thus, amid the accumulated results of excessive civilization, the salient, prolific energy of a genial and generous culture sometimes disappears: the fountains get overwhelmed and strangled by a set-back of their own waters; so that in place of a shouting and galloping stream, we have a standing and stagnant pool, perfectly calm and smooth indeed, but good for nothing save to mock the sky and floating clouds. Falling in love with the utility of knowledge as a means, men sometimes cease to pursue it as an end; and, while turning aside to pick up the golden apples of pleasure, or profit, or applause, miss the more excellent prize at the end of their course. Sometimes the mind stops thinking, to play or trade with the thoughts of others, and, like a path that is constantly trodden, has so many things running through it, that nothing can grow in it: sometimes, instead of opening itself out into a fountain, it merely turns itself into a jug, a thing very good to hold cider or wine, but not to bear apples or grapes: sometimes it gets encumbered with the trophies of its own ingenuity; or imprisoned and

benighted in the splendid castles of its own building; or, through idolatry of its own inventions, cuts itself off from the source of truth and life, and waxing self-enamoured, perishes, Narcissus-like, in the act of embracing and kissing its own watery image. In short, the lamp of civilization, with its numerous highly-polished reflectors, sometimes dazzles and blinds men with excessive brightness; for men may have so *much* light they cannot see. Perhaps it were well to remember that mere height of position does not necessarily infer elevation of character; and that the most elegant swords can avail us but little if purchased with the loss of our arms.

Such, then, in a greater or less degree, was the difference between the ages of Shakspeare and of Hume. In depth and entireness of culture, the former has probably never been surpassed; whereas the latter was a period of excessive civilization, when the solid metal of the English mind seems to have been chiefly occupied in spreading and polishing itself into a shining surface. The one, therefore, gave us profound and universal men, whose many-sided development mirrored forth all the objects around them at once;—men like Bacon, or Raleigh, for example, who could do any thing, who could excel in any thing;—the other produced adroit and skilful craftsmen, whose one-sided development could mirror forth but a single object. Hence it is, that in the latter period we find men spoiling their workmanship by their singleness and exclusiveness of faculty; for the exclusive cultivation of any one faculty is very apt to spoil it; and men must be able to do many things in order to do any one of them well.

Health and beauty come by a just proportion of many elements; and to overwork any single element, results only in disproportion and disease. Pope, for example, was the prince of versifiers, and Hume the prince of logicians: with the one versification strangled itself in a tub of honey; with the other logic broke its neck by trying to fly in a vacuum. It is by no means strange, therefore, that the thousand-eyed philosophy of Shakspeare should have seemed a perfect monster to the one-eyed logic of Hume!

It is obvious, moreover, that culture must exist, must go on working inwardly, for some time, before its outward manifestation can begin. Shakspeare's age, accordingly, was the birthday of modern civilization; the precise period when the powers that produced it, were in their highest vigor; when culture had attained its greatest depth, and broke forth in such a flood of results as hath never been equalled. The creative faculties had become so overcharged with life, that they constantly issued in original, organic productions,—productions replete with the life and living power of nature. Art had not then learnt, as it afterwards did, to admire and dress itself in the looking-glass of criticism. Free from conceit and vanity, and content to be the medium, not the object of vision,—the light to reveal, not the thing revealed,—it gave itself up unreservedly to its appropriate service; for art is always most perfect when most concealed, and in its highest form, is a secret even unto itself. Accepting nature as both law and impulse, and hiding their skill not only from others, but even from themselves, authors wrote because they had something to say; wrote from a full mind, from genial inspirations

of truth: and the result was, unrivalled strength and originality of thought. In Hume's age, on the contrary, the critical constellation was in the decided ascendant. Criticism, with its huge Medusa's-head, had turned the creative faculties into stone. Art, self-enamoured, went to colouring and adorning itself for show; and if it had anything to do with truth and nature, it was only to flirt and coquette with them, and thereby feed its own vanity. Instead of aiming at exhibitions of life, authors undertook to supersede and dispense with them; they aspired to something more elegant and refined, and so busied themselves in getting up the forms of life without the power thereof. Taking art for their guide, instead of nature, and substituting the love of excelling for the love of excellence, they of course became artificial; wrote, not so much to express their thoughts, as to show their skill in writing; not so much from inspirations of truth, as from calculations of effect, and according to certain rules generalized from their ancestors. What was wanting in soul must needs be made up in surface; having no inward life, the work had to be polished or varnished up so as to hide its want of life; and the result was, mere regularity and elegance of style.

Such is the difference between art listening directly to nature and echoing her voice, and art listening only to itself and echoing its own voice; the former of which was the case when Shakspeare wrote, while the latter was the prevailing custom when Hume wrote; which custom, itself a spiritual pestilence exhaled from the stagnant pools of French literature, spread dearth over all the higher English literature of that period. Writers of the latter period, whether attempting to create or to

criticize, knew no method of working or of judging but by the observance or application of external rules; and their authorship or their criticism was not so much the noblest utterance of the man, moved into genial overflowings at beholding the bright countenance of truth and nature, as a something put on for the occasion, and smacking more of the actor than of the poet. Hence the perpetual strife between their sentiments as men, and their theories as critics. They could easily demonstrate by their rules, that they ought not to be moved by Shakspeare, still they could not help being moved; and now they censured, now they praised, according as the critic or the man was uppermost in them. Thus they kept vibrating between nature and their system—the one forcing them to admire what the other forced them to abjure. Unable to resist his power, yet evermore disputing his right, their hearts were often most touched with what their heads pronounced most incorrect; and instead of explaining the ground of Shakspeare's unexampled sway over the human mind, they kept trying to show how the human mind ought or ought not to be swayed.

Errors, it seems to me, of no little malignity, have sometimes risen from overlooking the distinction I have been endeavouring to unfold. We often congratulate ourselves on our alleged exemption from the evils and vices of other times; forgetting, perhaps, that in the order of nature a rich soil produces in equal luxuriance the good and the bad; that noble triumphs can be achieved only against powerful antagonists; and that we cannot rise to great heights without great obstacles to surmount. Nature, indeed, seems to do almost every

thing on the principle of compensation. By means and methods past our finding out, she works, silently but surely, to prevent a monopoly of her gifts. She will not let us into the secret of her doings; she will not admit us to a seat in her privy council; even her plainest words are oracular, and unfold their meaning only along with the events to which they refer. Looking at the surface of things, we often think we can compute and control results; meanwhile, however, influences beyond our depth are operating to outwit and defeat us. When the path seems clearest and straightest before us, and we promise ourselves an easy and speedy conquest, first we know we are taken aback; we cannot get along because there is nothing to hinder us; if there be no obstacles to impede us, perhaps our energies are paralyzed by the want of them. And this is as true of different ages as of different individuals; insomuch that the further we push our comparison of one age with another, the more we shall find "equalities so weighed that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety;" and perhaps any one age will seem better, or seem worse,—better off, or worse off, than another,—according as we direct our minds more to what it has gained, or what it has lost, by the change. The riches of creation are disposed about us in a circle; the nearer we get to one side, the farther we are from the other; or, if we proceed to accumulate, while grasping one thing perhaps we lose our hold on something better. No sooner is the eye satisfied with objects, than it is attacked with weakness; shutting ourselves up from the cold, we pine for the sunshine and the breeze; and the more we cut away the thorn, the more

we bleed the life out of the rose. When, impatient of inequality, we have reduced all to our own level, we escape, indeed, the pain of being looked down upon, but sigh for something to look up to; having thrown aside the fetters of prescription, we "feel the weight of chance desires, and long for a repose that ever is the same;" and no sooner have we cast off the authority which checked and chafed us, than we wish its return as a means of protection. Annoyed by the presence of evil, we remove the occasion, and lo! the good disappears; arm ourselves with spiritual guidance, and find our going obstructed by an overload of preparation; invent optic-glasses to aid our vision of truth, and find her hidden or distorted by our very instruments. Thus does nature vindicate her impartiality towards her children, while they are so ignorant of their real wants, that the gods, we are told, sometimes let them have their own way on purpose to plague them.

I do not say, that other and earlier conditions of life are on the whole superior, or even equal to ours, but that we cannot have the blessings of any one condition without paying something for them; that civilization does not so much enrich the soil, as diffuse and equalize the fertility it already has; that it consists rather in augmenting our external facilities, than in unfolding and strengthening our inward faculties; that it helps us along more by removing obstacles from our path, than by creating within us the power to surmount them; that by accumulating inventions and achievements upon us, it tends perhaps to extinguish or enfeeble the virtues that produced them; and that it is not well to pride

ourselves too much on improvements which we could not have avoided, and would not have made.

CONDITIONS AND RESOURCES OF GENIUS.

THE overweening arrogance of modern illumination has probably sprung in part from ignorance or oblivion of these things. In some respects the present age is unquestionably ahead of preceding ages. Aware of the advance in some things, many people seem to presume, or expect, an equal advance in all. Hence the restless fanaticism of innovation and incontinence in reform, which is not content to leave any thing unreformed, and is even threatening to make war upon the heavens themselves, merely because they are old. It is not unimportant, therefore, to know where progress has been made, and where it has not ; where progress is possible, and where it is not ; lest, through pride of innovation, we forget, as peradventure we may, that in some things whatsoever is new is probably false, and therefore false, even because it is new. In *all* things, indeed, real progress is apt to be slow : to climb is never easy ; and a very rapid movement naturally argues our course to be downwards. In other words, all true progress is of the nature of a growth, which is always silent and imperceptible ; and when we see men endeavouring to jump from one stage to another, we may know it is not “the reformation that draweth on the change,” but “the desire of change that pretendeth the reformation.”

Now, there are some things that proceed mainly on external accumulations and successive inventions. In

these each age may obviously begin where the preceding age ended. Centuries, for example, had to be spent in discovering and improving the mechanic arts, before Herschell could make his fine astronomical observations. The occultations and emersions of Jupiter's satellites could not be known without telescopes; the natural history of animalculæ could not be written without microscopes; nor could these instruments be made without the "science of optics." Undergraduates can now learn more of the internal structure of the human body in a few weeks, than Bacon knew, or could have known, had he made it his exclusive study. Will any one argue from this, that the school-boys of our day are wiser than the sages of former times? Thus, whatever depends on outward, local conditions, on artificial resources and transmissible facilities, on the collective or concurrent labours of successive minds, in a word, science and the arts connected with it, is of course progressive from age to age.

On the other hand, whatever has its conditions within us, and depends on original power, and proceeds on individual development, is originated and perfected with individual minds. Men come into the world just as weak, and gain strength just as slowly, in this as in former times. We all have to start from the cradle, and grow gradually out of it, precisely as our fathers did; we may indeed have better cradles to start from, but does the infant grow any faster or better for our improvements in cradle-making? Books are printed much better now than they were two centuries and a half ago, but they are not written nearly so well; the reason whereof appears to be, that we have inherited and im-

proved the facilities our fathers had for printing books, but not their faculties for writing them. Men are constantly finding out quicker and easier methods of passing from city to city, from want to wealth; but the passage from the germ to the blossom, from ignorance to wisdom, still goes, and must go, by the old, slow method of growth and development. It would be foolish to suppose our Norman ancestors were up to us in the science of anatomy; and perhaps it would be equally foolish to suppose they fell behind us in perception of character. Great advances have undoubtedly been made in Biblical criticism since the days of Hooker and Taylor; but it would not be easy to find better divines than Hooker and Taylor among their successors. Bacon and Milton found much fault with the system of education prevalent in their time; yet none of the systems since established have produced such men as Bacon and Milton. Nature, as seen by the instruments and faculties of science; her chemical affinities, magnetic curves and mechanical laws; her fossil remains, extinct species, and organic proportions; was certainly much less known a hundred years ago than she is now, and perhaps is as much less known now than she will be a hundred years hence: but nature, as seen by the eye of genius,—her loves, hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, sympathies, and duties,—

“Her sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,
Her melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,”

was as knowable, and doubtless as well known, a hundred or three hundred years ago, as she is at this day,

or perhaps ever will be. In a word, we can accumulate estates and sciences, but not genius ; we can inherit useful inventions, but not inventive faculties. The powers and resources of genius are, for most part, independent of outward, local conditions of any sort ; its resources are everywhere, its powers within itself. It needs no wings, can use none, save those it brings into the world ; all others in fact being only an incumbrance to it. It works not with any cunningly-devised mechanical instruments, nor by the light of any artificial fireworks, and therefore waits not for their invention ; all its triumphs proceed, and must proceed, from its in-born energies, and by the light of common day. Its progress is individual and incommunicable ; running, not through successive minds, but only through successive stages of the same minds, and depending, not on external, acquired facilities, but simply on the coming forth of its inward powers. Of course, therefore, genius reaches its limit when it unfolds all that it contains ; so that men will have to be made, not merely situated, better than they have been, before they can produce better works than they have done. Scientific accumulation and mechanical invention may indeed make men better off, and *may* make them worse off ; but will hardly bring any thing out of them, that was not put into them.

We are not to suppose, however, that genius is independent of education ; for all education worth the name, is but development ; but the power of self-development is, in a greater or less degree, an essential part of genius. Whether, therefore, and how far genius will get developed, depends not so much on any outward, local conditions, as on the degree of its inward

strength and vitality. Perhaps, indeed, all the rudiments of a Homer or a Milton exist in the dullest of us ; but, either from the depth and density of earth about them, or from their lack of innate, vital energy, they prove to be buried rather than planted in most of us. The germs of original power, if they be in us at all, are incased in shells so thick and hard, that the quickening and developing influences of nature cannot affect them ; so that millions pass through life with scarce a blossom or leaf of their nature unfolded. It is impossible to tell how many of these germs remain undeveloped in the best of us. Some of the noblest and richest minds have left us evidence that some of their rudiments had not put forth at all ; cut off in the flower of their strength and beauty, when new susceptibilities were bursting into life, as if the vase of mortality had cracked asunder from the very redundancy of riches unfolding in its bosom.

To unfold and perfect these rudiments, is the end of all instruction ; sometimes, however, as hath been said, they unfold themselves better of their own accord ; for instruction is but an effort to assist the growth of that which has not vitality enough to grow of itself ; and what are helps to ordinary minds may be hindrances to genius, as crutches, though an aid to the lame, are a hindrance to the sound. Now, it is characteristic of some minds, that their openness and sensitiveness to the developing influences of nature supersede, in a greater or less degree, the need of artificial instruction. Such is their fineness of structure and fulness of vital force, that they quicken and expand of their own accord as soon and as fast as those influences reach them.

A Homer and a Shakspeare spring forth and unfold themselves spontaneously ; all the susceptibilities of humanity seem to come forth in them of their own sweet will. The omnipresent instructions of nature take immediate and full effect upon them, thus leaving the local instructions of art little or nothing to do. That harmony and completeness of mind, which others attain only by the longest and hardest labor, they seem to have brought into the world with them. A Milton and Schiller, however, struggle forth slowly and painfully into development, by parts and degrees. The inborn riches of their nature unfold themselves one after another ; and it is not without many years of intense effort and study, that they can build themselves up into the form of finished strength and beauty.

Such minds, then, are said to have the gift of genius. They possess, though in different degrees, the power of self-development. Their susceptibilities do not wait for artificial instruction, but open themselves sooner or later of their own accord. What in others comes forth at best only by the utmost assistance of art, in them comes forth of its own free growth. They need no stimulants, no allurements, no provocations, to set them in motion ; no candles or torches to illuminate their path : like the sun, they have both light and agility ; they know no rest but in motion ; no quiet but in activity ; and do not so properly apprehend, as irradiate objects ; not so much find, as make things intelligible. To them nature, wherein many see nothing good but fields for raising cotton and corn, is a book of celestial revelations. They are therefore not the pupils, but the teachers of mankind ; not the creatures, but crea-

tors of civilization. They are the authorized interpreters between nature and us ; and it is their capability of nature's instructions, that qualifies and commissions them to instruct us ; though, unfortunately, many of us are incapable even of their instructions. To teach us what nature teaches them, to unfold in us what nature unfolds in them, is the first and last of their duty. Indeed civilization itself is but the diffusion, in one form or another, of what genius originates : all genuine progress of society in arts, and manners, and faculties, is but the gradual coming up of all to the point where genius originally stands. Hence it is, that the multiplied facilities of artificial education have always seemed to afford genius little or no improvement ; for its powers and productions have generally sprung up, almost at once, from infancy to manhood ; and we look in vain to see them advance along with us, because our advance is really but their diffusion.

With many, however, it is matter of wonder where genius is to look for the materials of its creations. We are ever prone to attribute our lack of vision to a defect of the object, not of the eye. Not discerning the elements of poetry in the scenes about us, we transfer them to distant times and places ; thinking it more probable that they should not be within our whereabouts, than that, being there, they should elude our perception. And, indeed, poets themselves have so often carried us into the land of fictions, and fables, and dreams, as almost to persuade us there is no poetry in the land of realities. In fact, however, it is not so much a matter of doubt where the elements of poetry exist, as it is where, save in some books and some minds, they do not

exist ; so that the finding of them depends much less on *where* we look than on *how* we look ; and he who does not find them everywhere will hardly find them anywhere. Poetry has been called the art of feigning ; but all who have ever looked into things, know it is much rather the art of revealing : for there is not a leaf or a line in the volume of creation, but would be most excellent poetry if faithfully translated ; and all good poems are but such translations. There is no wind so vulgar but it may be turned into music ; all the fragrances of Paradise are sleeping in the dullest clod ; and out of the commonest sunbeams may be drawn the colours of the rainbow. Poetry, indeed, is an universal presence, though not to be discerned by us except it be alive within us : it is in our breath, it is under our feet ; it nestles here, it whispers there ; it springs up from the cradle, hovers round the altar, watches at the tomb ; it has its

“ Dwelling in the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;”

in a word, it is the impassioned expression, the breathing eloquence which is in the face of all nature ; but it takes “ the vision and the faculty divine,” to give it an understanding and a tongue. In the hands of genius, the driest stick becomes an Aaron’s rod, and buds and blossoms out into poetry. Is he a Burns ? the sight of a mountain daisy unseals the fountains of his nature, and he embalms the “ bonny gem ” in the beauty of his spirit. Is he a Wordsworth ? at his touch all nature is instinct with feeling ; the spirit of

beauty springs up in the footsteps of his going; and the darkest, nakedest grave becomes a sunlit bank em-purpled with blossoms of life. For poetry is but the true and the good seen under the aspect of the beautiful; so that, rightly viewed,—viewed with the whole mind and heart, all things are replete with it. Do we not see this goodly frame of things, how each is fitted to the other; how each needeth, each helpeth, each rejoiceth in the other; how each is twice blessed, blessed in that it gives, and blessed in that it takes? and how all, with “divine respondence,” and “difference discreet,” and “sweet diversity,” knit and consort themselves into admirable harmony and reciprocity? Which harmony whoso perceiveth, and feeleth, he is the poet’s disciple; but whoso perceiveth, and feeleth, and *uttereth* it, he is the poet himself.

Here, then, are the true elements of poetry, in this breathing, beautiful, blossoming world about us,—this lowly home of humanity; the scene of all its sympathies and sufferings; its infinite longings and immortal loves; its hopes and fears born of eternity; its sighs of earth and dreams of heaven.

“Long have I loved what I behold,
The night that calms, the day that cheers;
The common growth of mother earth
Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,
Her humblest mirth and tears.”

In the ordinary scenes and events of human life; in humble cottages and “huts where poor men lie;” in all the sacred beatings and outbreathings of the human heart; and in the sanctities and sublimities of our com-

mon nature ;—it is in these things that the poet finds the elements of his creations ; it is through these that he expresses the riches of his soul.

Such being the conditions and resources of genius, I certainly am not quite prepared, at least as concerning the higher forms and expressions of thought, to endorse the prevailing notions, that contempt for the past is the beginning of wisdom ; and I own I dislike to see the beardless present abusing its gray hairs. There is wisdom, after all, in clinging to what God, and nature, and our fathers have made. The great danger, I suspect, with us good radicals and reformers is, that we shall not get up high enough ourselves to see any body above us. “Angels’ visits,” we are told, “were short and far between” in the best of times ; whether they have not ceased of late altogether, may be a question : one thing, however, seems quite certain, namely, that it is much easier to remember angels’ visits, than to invent them.

“ True is it, Nature hides

Her treasures less and less. Man now presides
In power, where once he trembled in his weakness ;
Science advances with gigantic strides ;
But are we aught enriched in love and meekness ?
Can aught be found in us of pure and wise
More than in humbler times graced human story ?
That makes our hearts more apt to sympathize
With heaven, our souls more fit for future glory ?”

Assuredly our present, perhaps growing lust of originality is the worst of all guides to truth. He who makes a merit of forsaking the old paths, certainly runs some risk of going astray. There may indeed be such a thing

as human advancement on the whole; but there has been so much of canting, and prating, and puffing about it of late, as almost to make one loathe the expression: there is but one thing its advocates are often caught in advance of, and that is the truth. At all events, if we would build higher than our fathers did, we had best preserve and continue what they begun; for if we tear down their structures, and begin anew, ten chances to one we shall not build so high as they did. There is an older and nobler astronomy than that which names and numbers the stars, and maps them down into nautical charts. Night, star-tongued, has other and wiser lessons for us than come through our modern optic-glasses. The heavens made their best revelations before telescopes were invented; the telescope, I suspect, may shut out more of wisdom than it lets in. Doubtless botany has its value; but the flowers knew how to preach divinity before men knew how to dissect and botanize them; they are apt to stop preaching though, as soon as we begin to dissect and botanize them. Our modern safty-lamps, after all, are good for nothing but to guide our footsteps downwards; if we wish to walk *on* the earth, not *into* it, we had better let the same old sun, which has always been shining, shine upon us still; for we may be assured, that he is as much better as he is older than any lamps or torches we can devise. We have indeed learned to dig up various agreeable sensations out of the ground; but the happiness which falls, unsought, "down from God's bosom silently," is no very modern discovery.

It is from these sources, and such as these, that genius draws its inspiration; and assuredly the issues were not

less pure and plenteous at the fountains where our fathers drank, than after passing through the aqueducts of later civilization. And these sources, as they are open always and everywhere, obviously need no instruments for their discovery and appropriation but the cunning eye and skilful hand. Moreover, as these sources furnish genius with its best materials, so they probably form its best school; and it is to be feared, that our best conducted school-rooms are quite as apt to shut the mind up away from them, as to shut it up with them; so difficult it is to monopolize the favors of nature, or to purchase any great advantage without some sacrifice. Whether, therefore, Shakspeare, even granting to him have been born in a rude age, was “educated in the lowest manner,” and “was without any instruction either from the world or from books,” must still be regarded, I suspect, as an open question. Wherefore, with Shakspeare’s works before them, Mr. Hume and various others minded like him, should have come to such conclusions respecting them; why he wrote as he did, and why they spoke as they did of his writings,—questions certainly of no little interest in the history of literature,—will form the subject of a future lecture. Meanwhile, perhaps I cannot better contribute towards a right estimate both of his works and of their criticisms, than by some general remarks on the nature and object of art; with which remarks, accordingly, I shall close this lecture.

NATURE AND OBJECT OF ART.

ART, in its broadest sense, may be aptly enough described as the sensuous, organic embodiment of ideas, emotions, and conceptions. In its process, therefore, and results, art is exactly the reverse of science ; for the one proceeds by synthesis, and ends with individualities ; the other proceeds by analysis, and ends with abstractions. And a similar difference is observable in their effects. Works of science, being addressed altogether to the understanding, give a partial, one-sided culture ; works of art, like those of nature, everywhere speak, and are always speaking, to our whole nature at once. Here every whole, and every part of each whole, springs up from the combined elements of all thought ; just as in nature every plant, and every part of each plant, springs up from the combined elements of all vegetation. A true knowledge, therefore, of works of art requires, and a true study of them will give, a genial, many-sided culture. To know an individual man, for example, such as nature produces, obviously requires the harmonious co-operation of all the faculties ; to know the abstract idea of man, such as science produces, requires but an exercise of the understanding. In other words, the individual is addressed to all the faculties of our nature at once ; exercises them all ; developes them all : the abstraction is addressed only to the scientific faculties ; exercises and developes them to the exclusion of the rest. Hence we often hear it said of men more conversant with metaphysics than with persons, that they know man very well, but know little or nothing of men ;

that is, they understand the species, but not the individual ; can reason admirably about the generic qualities and universal elements of humanity, but cannot rightly perceive or apprehend the qualities of actual men. On the other hand, we often find men who, knowing and caring little about abstractions and universals, are remarkably accurate in their judgments of men, and can almost always hit the individual precisely between wind and water. It is worthy of remark, that nature has nothing to do with abstractions ; never produces them ; but conveys all her instructions through individualities : that is, instead of general notions and propositions respecting facts, she uses the facts themselves ; makes all her revelations through them ; and in studying those facts the mind is exercised in its integrity, all its faculties being drawn out in due proportion. In like manner art, which is a kind of supplement and continuation of nature, turns thoughts into facts ; organizes ideas into individual, sensuous forms ; which facts and forms stand out before the mind as objects whereon all its faculties may be employed at one and the same time. Whether in this, nature and art be not better teachers than any of our abstraction-makers, perhaps will sufficiently appear by the consideration, that our bodies are nourished by the food they digest, not by having their food digested before they take it.

A work of art then, such as a painting, or statue, or poem, is an idea, or emotion, or conception, suspended and developed in sensuous form, as the principle of vegetable life is suspended and developed in a tree, or the principle of animal life in a horse, or the principle of moral and intellectual life, in a man. Art, therefore,

is appropriately called the offspring of imagination, inasmuch as it consists in imaging forth to the senses the spiritual issues of the mind. The poet, also, is justly said to be "of imagination all compact," because

" With nature's hues,
Her forms, and with the spirit of her forms,
He clothes the nakedness of austere truth."

Being thus clad in the similitude of our own flesh, truth comes home to our human sympathies, and so meets and satisfies all the demands of our complex, many-sided nature. From the imagination, art of course speaks to the imagination, which is the organ wherein all the elements of our nature, all our powers of sense, and thought, and feeling, meet and work together. Imagination, therefore, has been justly styled the queen-faculty of the soul. It is the reconciling power between our sensuous and spiritual natures; the atoning faculty in which the otherwise discordant elements of our being harmonize and blend into simultaneous action; the soul's peacemaker, which causes the lion and the lamb within us to lie down and rise up together. Again, imagination is the organ through which the soul within us recognizes a soul without us; the spiritual eye by which the mind perceives and converses with the spiritualities of nature under her material forms; which tends to exalt even the senses into soul by discerning a soul in the objects of sense; and which

" Turns the common dust
Of servile opportunity to gold;
Filling the mind with sentiments august,
The beautiful, the brave, the holy, and the just."

Even the higher truths of reason and religion are to us but "airy nothings," ever dancing before the eye, yet ever eluding the grasp, thus mocking the hopes they inspire, until imagination, clothing and fixing them in the flesh of sensuous forms, "gives them a local habitation and a name," so that they may "steal access through our senses to our minds." Disembody those truths into abstractions, and they generally fly, like disembodied spirits, beyond our reach. For the thoughts will not long fix themselves where there is nothing for the eye to grasp; all our faculties of soul and sense must grow together, else none of them will thrive; all of them must work together, else none of them will work to much purpose; unless the mind employ the senses in its operations, the senses are pretty sure to divert the mind from them; the soul must spiritualize the body, or else the body will sensualize the soul, and religion will hardly keep her hold on the one, unless she be allowed to hold the other also. Therefore it is that men so signally fail, when they undertake to purify and exalt themselves by force of abstract ideas, without the co-operation of the senses in visible forms and outward acts. Such a course is at war with that unity and integrity of being and of action, after which our nature instinctively strives; which is indeed our nature's fundamental law; and however inviting it may seem at first, it generally winds itself into a quick return; nay, often ends in a stronger impulse in the wrong direction. This results from the necessity of harmony and unanimity among all the elements of our nature; and to aid, or sustain, or restore this harmony and unanimity, is the office of imagination and the object of art.

Accordingly, the Bible, I suppose, may be safely pronounced the highest work of art in existence ; for it is unquestionably among the most imaginative books, perhaps the most imaginative book ever written. It speaks in figures on almost every page ; is, indeed, a constant coalescence and interfusion of divine truth and sensuous imagery : like an illumined cloud, at once softening and revealing to our eyes the otherwise intolerable brightness of the heavenly effluence. Viewed, moreover, as a work of art, the Bible is everywhere replete with the truest and deepest meaning ; viewed as a work of science, or as a repository of abstractions, it often has either no meaning at all, or a false or unintelligible one. Therefore it is, perhaps, that those who view it and treat it as the raw material of moral and theological science, are constantly missing or mistaking its meaning, and of course raying out darkness on those whom they attempt to teach. Therefore it is, too, that men of mere science and logic,—men who study but to analyze and criticize,—so often remain unaffected by the teachings of the Bible ; for to men of this stamp our Maker himself is not a personal being to be loved, and worshipped, and adored, but only a kind of infinite theorem to reason, and speculate, and syllogize about. To such men the Bible seems very much as Paradise Lost seemed to a certain mathematician, who thought it might all be very fine to be sure, but couldn't see as it proved any thing ; for the aim of this as of every other work of art, is, not to prove but to reveal ; and such men never seek revelations, but only demonstrations of something ; it is not a supply of matter, but only an agitation of wit, that they are always in quest of. The

truths of the Bible are not communicable in the forms of logic, but only in the forms of life, as the Bible gives them ; and to analyze and anatomize those forms is not the way to discover their meaning, any more than we should tear a man's body in pieces to discover his character. So, also, the rites, and ordinances, and ceremonious observances of religion, which are ideas solidified, as it were, into facts, are expressing to the imagination what mere words and syllogisms cannot express, and what the mere understanding cannot receive. Hence we read that Moses, when called upon to show reverence, was required, not merely to say, but to do something ; to put the shoes from off his feet ; as if a fact, a deed, an exercise of the entire man in action, were the only way in which that sentiment could be shown. For facts, being of a mixed nature, combining many elements and properties in the self-same thing, contain something which cannot possibly be inclosed in logical forms ; which inevitably slips through the fingers of explanation ; which eludes our grasp the moment we attempt to evaporate, or volatilize them off into verbal statement ; and which our abstract propositions can no more be made to hold than a human skeleton will hold a human soul : so that to give the real meaning of facts, we must take the facts themselves along and show them.

The Bible, indeed, exemplifies throughout the ideal perfection of art ; for the highest possible triumph of art is, to conceal itself ; and it is characteristic of the Bible that, more than in any other work of art, the imagery disappears in its own transparency and expressiveness ; so that, if we view it with the right faculties, we see nothing and think of nothing but the truths and

ideas which it embodies. In the Bible, then, the sensuous forms and images are obviously valuable, not for their own sake, but for the truths and ideas which they contain. In other words, perfection of form, here as elsewhere, consists purely in expressiveness or significance. Nevertheless, we are not to suppose, as many seem to do, that those truths and ideas can be taken out of the facts and figures in which they are given, without being lost; or that they can be retained apart from the forms in which they have been fixed; any more than we can disembody a soul, and still keep it, or transfer it to a body of our own making. On the whole, it is hard to tell whether the efforts of some to reform and improve the Bible, to put its contents into forms better suited to the genius of the age—I say it is hard to tell whether this evinces more of irreligion or of ignorance.

Now, the several forms of art, such as painting, sculpture, music, poetry, architecture, are all but different means to one and the same end. Here, too, as in the Bible, the sensuous forms, whether visible, as in sculpture and painting, or audible, as in music, or both, as in poetry, are valuable only for what they contain. The work is excellent just in proportion as the form becomes invisible from its transparency; when, like a crystal lantern, the external figure is lost or forgotten in the translucency of the contents. On the other side, it is only as our minds become receptive or reproductive of the contents, that we can be said to have a true perception of the work, as a work of art. If our thoughts rest on the sensuous form, on the words, or colors, or sounds, the plain truth is, we are not viewing it with

the proper faculties. This holds true of all the forms of art, and indeed, of nature herself; for unless we find or feel a meaning beyond her sensible manifestations, nature is but the feeder of our bodies, not the instructress of our minds. The reason, therefore, why some men see nothing valuable in nature but cornfields and cotton-plantations, is, they have none but corn-eating and cotton-wearing faculties to view her with. To such men nature is, properly speaking, no nature at all, but only a sort of huge machine, put in motion by some omnipotent diagram, to manufacture useful articles and agreeable sensations for them.

Even so, unless music express some sentiment or emotion, it is really no music at all, but only a succession of sounds, and touches but the outward ear. Hence, the reason why the singing of a bird is often so much sweeter than our artificial music, is, that the one is the outgushing of the little creature's sweet, innocent, happy soul, while the other is often but a volume of audible wind. Marble, also, may be fashioned with the utmost ingenuity; but unless it become radiant or eloquent of some spiritual conception, it is but marble still, and no mere external elegance can inspire into a statue, and make it divine. Paints, too, may be tempered and arranged with infinite skill; but unless transfused with life and meaning, they do not form a picture, and make it breathe, but only a collection of colours, and strike no deeper than the optic nerve. So also, words and figures of speech may be strung together never so smoothly, and elegantly, and sonorously; yet, unless informed and transfigured with the soul of truth, and beauty, and thought, and passion, they do not form

poetry, but only verse, and are but "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

In all these cases, the sensuous forms, whether addressed to the eye, or the ear, or both, are obviously worth nothing whatever unless expressive or suggestive of some spiritual meaning. And, on the other hand, unless our minds receive or reproduce this meaning, the plain truth is, we are viewing the work only with our organic senses; that is, we do not understand it. Accordingly, Sir Joshua Reynolds says, that upon seeing the paintings of *Rafaele*, his first emotion was mere astonishment, that the world should so much admire such ordinary productions. Upon a little reflection, however, he suspected the fault must be in himself; criticism gave place to docility; and, after studying them a few days, he found, sure enough, that it had scarcely entered into the heart of the world, to conceive the surpassing beauty that dwelt in them. Here the impression of the mere form on his organic senses was attended only with disappointment; but as soon as the contents struck home to his spiritual senses, he was overpowered with their glory. If, however, instead of endeavouring to grasp their contents, he had closed his senses, both spiritual and organic, and contemplated them only with his critical tools and fingers, he would probably have found them somewhat rude, and rough and irregular; for this *Shakspeare* of painters was far enough from polishing his works down to a lifeless, expressionless elegance. In that case, Sir Joshua would have been in much the same predicament as Mr. Hume and various others in their criticisms upon *Shakspeare's* plays.

LECTURE IV.

ON SHAKSPEARE'S CRITICS—DIFFERENCE OF THE CLASSIC AND
ROMANTIC DRAMA—UNITIES OF TIME AND PLACE.

WORDSWORTH, speaking, apparently, of some one who, by a courtesy of language not unfrequent now-a-days, had gotten the name of poet, says with a fine mixture of science and satire :—

“ A poet ! he hath put his heart to school,
Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff
Which art hath lodged within his hand ; must laugh
By precept only, and shed tears by rule.
Thy art be nature : the live current quaff,
And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool,
In fear that else, when critics grave and cool
Have killed him, scorn should write his epitaph.
How doth the meadow flower its bloom unfold ?
Because the lovely little flower is free
Down to its root, and in that freedom bold.
And so the grandeur of the forest tree
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
But from its own divine vitality.”

There is so much of pertinent truth as well as excellent poetry in this sonnet, that I thought I could not do better than introduce it here as a sort of text to the following lecture.

Probably half the complaints and inconsistencies of

Shakspeare's critics have proceeded on the assumption that, though certainly an astonishing genius, he either did not know, or, knowing, did not observe any law in the construction of his works. Whether this be really the fact, perhaps cannot be very easily shown ; but one thing seems quite certain, namely, that, if it be, then Shakspeare was no genius at all, but only, at best, an inspired madman. Assuredly, most assuredly, genius and lawlessness do not and cannot go together. Undoubtedly, however, genius has its laws within itself ; indeed, it is its instinctive capability of being a law unto itself, that makes it genius. (The essential laws of thought were originally written on the human mind, as the essential laws of action were on the human heart. With most of us, indeed, these laws have lost their original, innate efficiency, whereby in following them we should have but to follow ourselves ; they no longer exist and act within us, as guiding and impelling principles issuing in spontaneous rectitude of thought ; but come to us from without to be superinduced upon us ; set themselves over against us, to constrain us into rectitude of thought. Genius, however, is free, unstudied, spontaneous accordance with the laws of thought. Retaining the inward original transcript of these laws as a living essential part of its nature, in obeying them, it has but to obey itself. In other words, genius is, so to speak, unfallen intellect ; it implies a sort of identity between the rule and the faculty of thought ; and contains a living, salient spring or principle of truth, ready to run out and enlarge itself into suitable demonstrations, upon all emergent objects and occasions. Genius, therefore, can no more be lawless than virtue can ; and the phrase,

lawless genius, really involves an absurd contradiction. Perhaps it is partly from the currency of this phrase, that men, or rather boys, sometimes affect lawlessness, in order to get the reputation of genius; which is much the same as if one should go about to approve the strength and purity of his moral instincts by telling lies and committing crimes.)

The constituent, then, of genius, is spontaneous sympathy and harmony with the natural order of things, as original innocence was with the moral order of things. It is from this very harmony, indeed, that genius derives its power over us; its works are but commentaries on the law written on the human mind; and it is purely their reflection of that law that makes them immortal. Therefore it is that genius reconciles, in its own operations, perfect obedience with perfect freedom. Ordinary minds, it is true, have to resign their freedom in order to attain it; they have to accept the law as an obligation imposed from without; have to begin by submitting to external constraints, and pass gradually into freedom through a long course of instruction and discipline, whereby the outward laws of thought recover their original inward efficiency. Genius, on the other hand, is originally and essentially free, but only in virtue of an innate, self-regulating power, which precludes the office of external rules; so that it goes right from within, and therefore does not have to be set right, or kept right from without.

The mind, then, that has to go out of itself to codes of criticism for guidance; that has to learn the law from without before obeying it, and in order to obey it; and that attains to rectitude of thought by a constrained

observance of external rules ;—such a mind is no genius at all. This, it is true, is the way most of us have to do ; but then most of us, I suspect, have little pretension to genius. That Shakspeare did not obey the law in such a form, is undoubtedly true ; and it is equally true, that he did not need to do so : but that he did not obey it as an innate guiding and impelling principle, is a perfect assumption. Why, it is the law alone that holds his works in existence ; did they violate the law, they would long since have perished by it : and what his critics have pronounced violations of law are really but revelations of other laws than were known to them. By a similar process of reasoning, certain logicians have tried to persuade us that the Scripture Miracles were violations of the laws of nature, and therefore unworthy of belief. But surely, before we accept their conclusion, we may be allowed to ask of them a catalogue of the laws of nature. Let them be sure, then, that they exhaust the subject ; that they give us all the laws of nature, and none but the laws of nature ; and, on this ground, perhaps we shall be allowed to wait a while, if, indeed, we be not excused altogether. At all events, until they have done this, we will venture to suspect that the aforesaid Miracles are revelations of law, and not violations thereof. They might just as well argue, that a dog violates the laws of nature in sending his limbs downwards and running about on feet, instead of taking root in the ground, and shooting his limbs upwards like a tree. Undoubtedly, in some sense, the dog does violate the laws of vegetable nature ; but, in the only sense material to the question, he does not and cannot violate them, because he is not subject to them ; but, instead of

violating them, he simply embodies and reveals another set of laws, known as the laws of animal nature.

Every true work of art is essentially organic, and as such, of course contains within itself the reason why it is so and not otherwise, for this enters into the very idea of an organic work ; the form of the thing, and the laws that mould and govern that form, are individual and innate, and therefore are to be sought for within the work itself, not in any codes of criticism. In the organic productions of nature, for example, it is the inward, invisible life that originates and shapes the outward visible structure ; and the structure will of course be animal or vegetable, according as it is the work of animal life, or of vegetable life. Each structure, too, is to be judged by its own laws, not by the laws of the other. If, then, the question be asked, Why we have here an animal instead of a vegetable, and there a vegetable instead of an animal ? the answer is, Because the principles of animal and of vegetable life required different forms, and therefore made their respective forms to suit themselves. It is so in works of art ; and we might just as well quarrel with an animal for not being a vegetable, or with a vegetable for not being an animal, as quarrel with the Shaksperian drama for not conforming to the laws of ancient art. The truth is, the spirit of ancient culture and the spirit of modern culture required just such different manifestations ; nay, neither of them *could* be manifested, but could only be *buried*, in the form of the other. Suffice it to say, then, that both forms are equally perfect ; both are equally conformable to their respective laws, and equally adapted to their respective ends.

It is probably from ignorance or oversight of these considerations, that the charges of irregularity and extravagance, so often visited upon Shakspeare, have sprung. If the classic drama be taken as the sole standard, the Shaksperian drama will of course be found altogether anomalous. But then the reverse would be equally true and equally just ; and for the same reason a dog would appear altogether anomalous, if compared with a cabbage, or a horse, if compared with an elephant. Hence it is, that Shakspeare has appeared to many but a wild irregular genius, having no centre, and describing no orbit, whose astonishing faults were rendered tolerable only by as astonishing beauties. Hence, doubtless, “some,” in the words of Hume, “have even suspected his greatness to be overrated from the fact of his being disproportioned and misshapen ;” and that, however great and radiant he may sometimes appear, he is by no means entitled to be ranked among the heavenly bodies. The truth is, Shakspeare knew where his own centre, and where his own orbit lay, better than all of them ; and when he seemed *ex-orbitant* to them, it was only because his true orbit lay out of their system. Their astronomy was not comprehensive enough to include the system to which he belonged ; and he must perforce appear irregular and eccentric to them, for the very reason that he was true to the centre and true to the path which nature appointed for him.

To men, indeed, of mere varnish and outside, and even to unimaginative men, the forms of art, like forms in religion, of course seem mere formalities ; that is, not things to be looked into. but only things to be looked

at. Such men can see nothing in a work of art but surface ; and as they have no sense or perception of the inward meaning, so they can make no allowance for external irregularities, however necessary such irregularities may be to express that meaning. Rejecting, therefore, truth and nature, they would bring every thing down to the standard of superficial regularity and elegance. All they want, all they can appreciate, in works of art, is, mere appearances uninformed with meaning,—mere surfaces unsupported by substance. Without the sense or the faculty to apprehend truth or life in the forms of art, they therefore prize the form only for its own sake, and see no reason why it should be thus and so, but what is external to the work itself

Such, in a great measure, appears to have been the case with the critics in question. They were always seeking the reason, the *law* of work of art, not within the work itself, but in their critical statute-books. In their hands, the spirit of modern art, or rather the *spirit* of all art, was lost in an exclusive attention to the details of form ; while, again, excellence of form with them consisted, not in correspondence to the inward life, but in correspondence to certain rules generalized from the art of a former age. In a word, it was not truth, or life, or nature, but mere regularity that they sought for in the forms of art. Shakspeare was somewhat different from them. Instead of occupying himself, like a mere artisan, upon the form of his works, he gave himself up, like a true artist, to the spirit, and left that spirit to shape a form for itself. That he followed this method, which is the method of nature, is the very thing, indeed, that made him an artist, and that has kept

and keeps his works alive; otherwise they would not be works of art, but only works of mechanism. With him, therefore, as with every true artist, excellence of the form consisted in its fitness to reveal the contents; and if he had constructed it according to the ancient models, he would have hidden instead of revealing them. Looking, however, only to the form, and judging even that by impertinent laws, the aforesaid critics of course found, or rather fancied, it altogether wrong; whereas if they had looked for the contents, as they should have done, perhaps they would have forgotten or approved the form in the revelations it made to them. They are continually finding fault with Shakspeare for not expressing his meaning in the old forms; but, if he had used those forms, he would have expressed their meaning, not his, if, indeed, he had expressed any *meaning* at all; and it was because he had a meaning of his own to express, that he originated a new form to express it with. On the other hand, had these critics understood this meaning, they would not have seen, at least they would not have blamed any irregularity in the form that gave it to them; for in that case they would have known that the work crossed their rules only to fall in with higher ones, and therefore was strictly regular in the right sense of that term.

The trouble, then, with these critics was, that they knew and allowed, so to speak, of but one kind of animal life: they had seen, for example, the horse, and had studied the rules, mark me, I say, *rules*, not principles, of his outward form; for if they had caught the *principle* of the structure, namely, its fitness to the life it embodied, they would have known at once that a differ-

ent form of life required a different structure. It therefore seemed to them a very great piece of rudeness, and a most singular freak of lawless caprice, (however wonderful the thing might be, and how much genius soever it might evince), that another kind of animal life, which they had not conceived of, should organize itself into the form of an elephant. This was too much for them; they could not stand it; "*'twouldn't do*;" the thing was an anomaly, a monster; *it did not conform to the rules*. Nay, it was not so very large after all; only its exceeding deformity caused it to appear much larger than it really was. Nevertheless there was a wonderful power in it; it bore down all before it; surely there must be something in it worth the saving. Perhaps it was but a horse after all, grown out of his proper shape and size from an excess of vital energy, or because he had no good models to shape himself to; and if he could only be restored to his proper form, surely he would be a noble beast. An attempt was accordingly made to reform the elephant into a horse, and he came out—one of Shakspeare's dramas remodelled according to the rules of good taste and sound criticism.

In art, undoubtedly, as in some other things, "he is oft the wisest man who is not wise at all." For the true artist is not he who consciously moves and guides the development of his theme, and moulds its form according to external rules; but he who, by clear insight and deep meditation, gets so inspired with his theme, that it comes to move and guide him, so as, through him, to organize itself into a form expressive of its spirit; as, in nature, the germ, or plastic principle of organic life, developes itself of its own accord into the surround-

ing materials, and shapes a form according to its innate laws; and whether that form ought to be an animal or a vegetable, a bird or a fish, depends simply on the nature of the organizing principle. It is in this sense that Shakspeare is without an equal, or even a second, in dramatic art. For he is not so much the imitator as the rival of nature; and it seems hard to tell which of the two was the model and prototype of the other. Or rather, he is a sort of joint workman with nature; and as Pope finely remarks, "it is not so correct to say, that he speaks from nature, as that she speaks through him; his characters are so much nature herself, that it seems a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as imitations of her." Hence it is, that so many praise Shakspeare for his exceeding naturalness, without seeming to know either what he is, or what nature is. In the words of Lamb, "he is indeed natural; so profoundly natural as to be beyond the depth of most of us." We call his characters natural, meaning, simply, that their forms and costumes are natural, like the forms and costumes of those about us; while, perhaps, in either case we know nothing of the profound and mysterious nature which they inclose. Hence it is, too, that Shakspeare's plays can never grow old. Human customs, and institutions, and even languages, die and pass out of remembrance; but nature and all that is of nature flourish in everlasting growth. She is as fresh and as young at this moment, as she was when the morning stars first sung together over her birth; and it seems but a truism, to say that the works of Homer and Shakspeare, as they are a part of nature, so they share with her the gift of immortality. Age, therefore, cannot

touch, time cannot wither, custom cannot stale them; for the morning dews, the freshness, the spirit of nature is upon them, and there it will remain forever.

Nothing, assuredly, can be more unsuitable than the undertaking to try the details of such works as these, separately and successively, by a preconcerted system of rules. It is viewing and judging them apart from the organizing principle which truly constitutes them what they are. A work that can stand such a trial is really no work of art at all; the fact of its surviving such a process is alone sufficient to condemn it. Yet such was the process, such the method almost uniformly employed by the class of critics whose notions I have been considering. Seeking for nothing in works of art but what was to be found by eviscerating, and dismembering, and tearing to pieces, these critics of course required for their purpose, not embodied souls, but soulless bodies. The soul fled from a work of art before their dissecting knife; and their critical clippings, and splicings, and amputations of some of Shakspeare's progeny, prove that they knew not what the life of such a thing was, nor what the death of it was. Such a cutting up of works of art to discover their meaning is like dissecting a man alive to find his soul: by the time we have got where the soul is, the *soul* is not there; and if we wish to learn what it is, we must first lay aside our impious familiarity towards the shrine wherein it dwells.

The method pursued by these critics is all of a piece with the disposition of certain people to cull and cut out the beauties of an author, as they call them. It is to feed this disposition, that various books of elegant extracts have been published. In the case of bad or indif-

ferent authors, this may do, for it serves to hide from us their blunders and stupidities ; but as much as bad authors gain, so much must good authors lose by this process ; for I agree with old Montaigne, that every abridgment of a good book is a very foolish abridgment. Indeed the upshot of this whole proceeding is, that it indicates a total ignorance of what a genuine literary production is. It is not unlike the course of a certain child, who, delighted with the singing of his canary bird, cut it open to see what it was that made the music ; or of the woman in the fable, who, having a hen that laid a golden egg every other day, in her haste to get all the gold at once, dissected the poor hen, and found her nothing different from other hens. For a genuine literary work is not a collection of wheat and chaff, to be winnowed before it is fit for use ; but a living tree covered with leaves, and buds, and blossoms ; cut it up for its beauties, and all is but chips. Or, to vary the figure, such a work is not a mere articulation of parts, dovetailed together grossly or closely, according to the dulness or ingenuity of the artisan ; but an organic growth like the human form, shaping and fashioning itself out into an individual whole ; and it is the breathing harmony, the eloquent physiognomy of the whole, that forms its beauty and its worth. Selecting beauties from such a work is quite as foolish and almost as wicked, as plucking out a lady's eye and showing it to us on a plate, that we may the better appreciate and enjoy her beauty. Now, if the lady were just no lady at all, but merely an automaton with glass eyes, all this might do well enough, for, in that case, there would be no life or expression to be lost ; but as

it is, the very life and living grace which made the divine beauty of this soul-speaking organ, has of course been destroyed by the separation. Take, for example, Falstaff's side-shaking soliloquy over dead Hotspur, or Lady Macbeth's hair-stiffening soliloquy in her hell-haunted sleep,—take either of these from its vital connection in the character, and it is the lady's eye served up in the plate ; it has lost its life, and, parting with that, has of course lost all that made it worth the keeping. On the other hand, take Sempronius' speech, "My voice is still for war," &c., from its mechanical juxtaposition, and it is the glass eye freed from the wooden face ;—it had no life or expression to lose, and therefore is just as beautiful, or rather, just as destitute of beauty in one place as in another. In like manner, with every genuine literary work, it is only by studying the parts in their organic unity, and viewing them in their vital relation to the whole ; by opening the mind so as to take in the entire expression at once, that true judgment can be given, or true benefit received.

So much for dissecting, in quest of its merit, a thing whose merit consists, and ought to consist in its organic unity and integrity. It is evident that the more perfect a work of art is, the more it must suffer under this mode of treatment. For if it have no principle of life whatever ; if it have no such thing as organic integrity, it can lose nothing by being thus cut in pieces : but if it be pervaded with vitality ; if the parts be grown together into a living unity, the knife destroys, not discovers, its meaning. It is by thus cutting up things whose excellence consists in their fulness of organic life, that so much plausibility has been thrown over criticisms worth-

less in themselves. Particular passages are torn out from their vital connection in a character, and particular characters from their vital connection in a play, to be viewed apart from the relations in which they have grown up and taken their shape. It is this mode of treatment that has so often made Shakspeare seem to have done better and done worse than almost any other writer ; and that has caused the manifold glaring inconsistencies and startling antitheses, with which his critics have at once distinguished themselves, and perplexed their readers. The answer to all objections originating in this method of criticism, is, it has dissected what it should have contemplated ; it has used the knife where it should have used the eye ; and the living form, which it has killed, of course appears, when dissected, as much worse than a piece of mechanism, as it was better than a piece of mechanism before dissection.

But perhaps the best commentary on the words of these men as critics, is to be gathered from their works as authors ; for, understanding the rules of art so well, they of course reduced their knowledge to practice ; thus acting the author or the critic indifferently, as fancy led or occasion required. Hence arose a style of authorship which forms a pretty exact counterpart to the method of criticism in question. These authors, since known as the artificial school, and whose productions furnish such a luminous commentary on their criticisms, are chiefly remarkable for that, in their hands the native, homebred vigor of the English mind disappeared in the all-extinguishing process of foreign imitation ; for they were but imitators of the French, who, again, were but imitators of the ancients. Of their works, indeed, as

dramatists, but few are now known at all; those few are known but little; and it were doubtless better for the authors, if even those were entirely forgotten; for they are remembered only as warnings.

I said these authors were directly or indirectly imitators of the ancients. It were more correct to say, they were copyists of the ancients. For true imitation has regard to the substance and life of a work, and therein differs from mere copy, which has regard only to the surface and form. Truly to imitate the ancients, it were necessary to follow their method, which was that of growth and development, not of manufacture; of creation, not of optical illusion; a process ending in realities, not in mere resemblances. If by intense study these authors had so caught the *spirit* of Classic art, that in their hands this spirit had freely organized itself into the Classic form, they would have been imitators in the right sense of the term. But the truth is, they never caught, or even sought for, the spirit of Classic art, but only observed and copied the form; they did not enter into the method of growth and development, but only manufactured appearances: instead of beginning at the centre, the heart of a character, and developing it outwards, they began at the surface, and of course never got beyond it. They were not artists, therefore, in any legitimate sense of that term, but mere literary artisans; they did not and could not produce any thing like true works of art, but only specimens of rhetorical and intellectual joinery, mere novel combinations, replete with the same kind of life as a watch, and which, having no inward reason for the outward

form, might resemble Pagan, Christian, Mahommedan, or nothing indifferently.

The main error, I suspect, with these authors, was, that in attempts at art they were always following the method of science, always using the analytic process where they should have used the synthetic, thus continually mistaking and substituting abstract ideas of human character for individual characters. Addison's Cato, for example, is in no wise a patriotic man, but a mere personification of patriotism, opening his, or rather *its* mouth in just such rhetorical and philosophical grandiloquence as no patriotic man could utter if he would, or would utter if he could ; and this tragedy, perhaps the best, certainly among the best of its class, is doubtless worthy to be regarded as a model specimen of what was in greatest demand at the time.

Of course every-body knows, that in the most fashionable and frivolous circles of people, some preconcerted and pre-acknowledged system of manners is necessary, to cover up original distinctions. As such code of manners is usually framed by the majority, innate stupidity and vulgarity are thus enabled to level the nobilities and gentilities of nature down to themselves ; for the truly vulgar man is he who, whether moving at the apex or base of society, can be and dares to be nothing but what the crowd is to which he belongs. Shoe the giant and the dwarf by the same last, and while the dwarf shall be able to play off all sort of elegant vulgarities, the giant shall not be able to walk, or even stand, for the pinching of his shoes ; and, being thus deprived of the use of his limbs, he will be kept from towering above the gentle dwarf. In circles professing mere fashion

and frivolity this is all quite proper ; for it helps exclude from their intercourse all objects save those for which they professedly associate. Otherwise, people might sometimes unwittingly bring a head, or a heart, or both into their polite gatherings, which would of course produce unspeakable consternation, and thus defeat the object, perhaps the existence, of the society.

Something very like this seems to have been the case with the authors in question. They required that authors should appear, not as men speaking to men, but only as representatives of certain literary formalities ; and he who, instead of trying how correctly and elegantly he could write, simply endeavoured with all his faculties to tell the truth, was the last man to be endured among them ; he was too rude and irregular for their society. With their critical spinning-jennies, gotten up on scientific principles so as to evolve and embody abstract ideas of character, and which a dunce, or a Nahum Tate, could turn and tend as well as, perhaps better than a Shakspeare, original distinctions might easily be kept down ; for with such helps all could do the same thing, or rather the same nothing in equal perfection.

Shakspeare's appearance, therefore, to these doctors of regularity and elegance, was probably not much unlike that of Burns to the Edinburgh aristocracy, when first invited into their parlours. With his rustic, massive, manly features, "big-glowing eyes," and heaven-taught courtesy ; measuring himself by turns against the wisest, the wittiest, and the gentlest ; meeting their common-place remarks with spontaneous bursts of native intelligence ; overpowering their maudlin affectations with free gushes of pathos ; and drowning their polished rep-

artees in broad floods of humour, it is no wonder that, as history informs us, he caused these amiable professors and professoresses of etiquette to tremble with strange emotion, and even almost took some of the best of them off their feet. Doubtless, to their refined senses, he appeared a gigantic piece of rudeness; for how should they, with their strong conventional optic-glasses, recognize this intrinsically gentlest as well as mightiest soul in all Europe, through such a total freedom from fashionable forms? For Burns had learnt manners in a school far different from theirs, and as much higher, indeed, as it was different. This lion, unlike Bottom in the play, had not learnt to “roar as gently as any sucking dove;” he had not become “one of those kind good souls, that dare tell neither truth nor lies.” Giant as he was, he had not refined off his head and refined out his heart, disbrained and unsouled himself down to a level with the sweet popinjays and dandiprats around him; nor shod his thoughts with felt, to suit their delicate ears! On the whole, his sunbeams could not be expected to *weigh* so much as their elegant, nicely-carved table meats. Nevertheless Burns was a true man; and they, at that time and in that place, were, for most part, little better than animated costumes. Doubtless, too, they believed him to be a genius, for they had probably been told so by others; and they were of course ready to honour him when, by doing so, they could distinguish themselves. And perhaps, in their hours of solitude, when they had lain off their “thrice-piled folds of social reserve,” and unbuttoned their tight-laced, drawing-room corsets, and returned to something else than mere conventional motions,—for they doubtless had some heart and some head,

when they were away from the vanities and amid the interests of life ;—perhaps, I say, in such hours, his genius, through his published works, had even visited their hearts with some touches of nature, and kindled some gleams of a human soul there ; for it is the prerogative of such a genius to create a soul even under the ribs of death : but in his presence how could they, engrossed with the strong contrast between his free mountain graces and their own polished elegancies, discern any thing but rudeness and greenness in him !

DIFFERENCE OF THE CLASSIC AND ROMANTIC DRAMA.

IN a former lecture, I spoke of Shakspeare as the father of the Gothic or Romantic drama, and of this drama as being to modern culture what the Classic drama was to ancient culture. These expressions evidently infer some essential difference between ancient and modern culture. A clear understanding of this difference will probably throw more light on the subject of dramatic criticism than any other aid we can get. It can be best illustrated, perhaps, by a reference to the other forms of art ; for the various forms of art, in any given age or nation, are always moulded upon common principles and animated by a common spirit. Indeed, the art of an age or nation is, so to speak, the efflorescence of its whole spiritual life and endeavour. The poetry, music, architecture, and especially the drama of an age, is the breath and finer spirit of all its strivings and attainings. It is in these that the genius of an age or nation reaches its crowning development ; that its inner, secret, life-giv-

ing efficacy attains its highest and fullest manifestation. And, on the other hand, it is the kind and degree of spiritual culture, in a word, the religion of an age, that gives life, and shape, and law to all its forms of art ; so that the arts are not so much different members of the same family, as different embodiments of the same soul addressed to different organs.

Every true artist, therefore, is, in a greater or less degree, the soul of his age. He is the extraction and concentration of its thousandfold interests and activities ; the centre and convergence of its whole mind and heart ; in whom the various scattered rays that make up its character meet and kindle up into expression ; whose ability to electrify the age into life and health springs from his redundancy of the power that already pervades it. His works, according to their degree of perfection, are the abstract and fifth-essence of its entire being ; “the blossom and fragrance of all its knowledge, thoughts, passions, emotions, language.” It is by having more than all others the spirit common to all others, by being just like them only more so, that he becomes the genius of the age. What lies voiceless and dim in them, he makes vocal and clear ; to their dumb wants he gives speech ; their inarticulate jargon he turns to eloquence, and thus makes them acquainted with each other and themselves. Through him and his works heart speaks and responds to heart ; mind calls and answers to mind. His voice is like the music of humanity awakening into utterance the kindred music sleeping in the bosoms of those around him. He strikes up a song in which all can join, inspiring and inspired ; a song in which all were ready to join before, and waiting

only for the key-note to be given them. What must else remain locked up in individual bosoms; what each must else possess in silence and solitude, thus becomes matter of communion, and sympathy, and fellowship. It is this circumstance that so much endears the true artist to his fellow-men. Hence it is that the sacred spirit of humanity, of which he is the representative, embalms his works with the immortality of its own being.

Nothing less, therefore, than a radical change in the culture and condition of the human mind could do away with genuine productions of art. Such a change has undoubtedly taken place; it is traceable in all our modes of thought, social manners, religious sentiments, and public institutions; but how, and why, and whence it came, are questions of no little difficulty. Christianity alone was doubtless competent to produce this change, but whether its origin lay here, or in the pre-existing state and structure of the Gothic mind, perhaps cannot be fully determined. The surprising readiness with which the northern nations received Christianity upon its first promulgation among them, would seem to argue some peculiar harmony and congeniality of spirit between them. The change, then, in question, was probably the joint result of certain concurrent, original tendencies in them both; a concurrence whereby each helped to develope, and realize, and perpetuate the tendencies of the other. At all events, Christianity, if not the creative, is at least the shaping and informing spirit of modern culture; and the development it has wrought is as original as the disclosures it has made. True to its mission, it has given mankind a new set of ideas, objects, aims, hopes, and aspirations. That this new life

and law of human development should effect a corresponding change in the spirit and form of art, was really as desirable as it was inevitable. Accordingly, it has stamped its genius on all the forms of modern art, and especially on the drama, which is perhaps the highest form of art. Nay, it was by giving new shape and life to the drama, that the spirit of modern culture gained its last and highest triumph; and, on the other hand, it was by giving the fullest and freest dramatic utterance to the same spirit that Shakspeare became the father of the Romantic drama.

The true explanation then of the difference between Classic and Gothic art lies in the essential diversity of ancient and modern culture. This difference is exemplified in all the arts, either giving a modification of the same art, or where the art admits of no suitable modification, giving an altogether different art. Music, for example, admits of modifications in melody and harmony corresponding to the laws of ancient and modern art. Accordingly ancient music sought not harmony, because its appropriate excellence consisted in melody; and modern music rejects melody, because its appropriate excellence consists in harmony. The reason of this is, the simplicity of ancient art could not be musically expressed in harmony, while the complexity of modern art cannot be musically expressed in melody. An analogous difference may be traced in Classic and Gothic architecture; the perfection of the former consisting in a simple, smiling, statue-like expressiveness; of the latter, in a complex, awful, picture-like suggestiveness. Sculpture, on the contrary, admits of no modification expressive of the spirit of modern art. As a substitute, therefore, for

sculpture, modern art resorts to painting, and finds room on the canvas for all the complexity and diversity of expression which its spirit requires, but of which sculpture from its nature does not admit. The distinctive forms then, of ancient and modern art, are sculpture and painting. Accordingly, a statue-like simplicity pervades all the forms of ancient art of which we have any specimens ; while all the legitimate forms of modern art are pervaded with a picture-like complexity. Hence, as hath been ingeniously remarked, the ancient painters were probably too much sculptors ; while modern sculptors are too much painters. Their pencils would naturally try to form statues, and our chisels naturally try to form pictures. This results from the fact that the genius of ancient art was sculptural ; while the genius of modern art is picturesque.

The predominant tendency of the Greek mind was, to humanize the ideal ; of the Gothic mind, to idealize the human. Hence the former had its statues of the gods, merging the divine in the human, and circumscribing the infinite within the limits of human shape ; while the latter has its pictures of angels, exalting the human into the divine, and lending, with winged significance, the sentiment of infinitude to our finite humanity. Thus the one brought the ideal down to flesh and blood ; the other raises flesh and blood, up to the ideal. Besides the ancient religion, inculcating a firm belief in fate, drew the mind out of itself, to the observation of signs and omens, to *learn* its prospects ; modern religion, inculcating guardianship of heart and life, sends the mind into itself to the meditation of truth and duty, to *shape* its prospects. The former made perfection of life to con-

sist in a patient waiting for destiny, and therefore required the passions to be represented chiefly in repose, calm from intensity; the latter makes perfection of life to consist in a constant struggling for freedom, and therefore requires the passions to be represented chiefly in conflict, fierce from opposition. Moreover, in the ancient religion every thing was comparatively definite and intelligible; in the modern religion every thing tends to the infinite and mysterious. The one therefore gave more exercise to the perceptive powers, and directed the minds of men chiefly to objects; the other gives more exercise to the reflective powers, and directs the minds of men chiefly to relations.

A like difference may be traced in ancient and modern governments. With the ancients individuals existed more for the state. Personal freedom was comparatively sacrificed to permanent order. No one truly had, or truly was, his own. To each were assigned specific duties and a definite sphere. Individual interest and choice were forced to jump with the preadjustments of state; and all were moulded and mortised into some precise political whereabouts. Public order was maintained without regard to private will, by precise, definite legislation. With the moderns all this is reversed. Here the state exists more for individuals. Permanent order is comparatively sacrificed to personal freedom. Each is left to decide his own duties, shape his own character, and create his own sphere. The government is but clay in the hands of the people. To afford room for individual interest and choice, state preadjustments are forced to give way. Broad general principles of legislation furnish the only ground of compromise between public

authority and private will. The ancient character, moreover, was comparatively one of narrow, intense nationality; the modern is comparatively one of wide, comprehensive humanity. The ancients regarded each other more as fellow-citizens, and gloried chiefly in being Greeks, or Romans, or Jews; the moderns regard each other more as fellow-beings, and glory chiefly in being men. Those aimed more at the freedom and welfare of their country; these aim more at the freedom and welfare of mankind. Everywhere, in short, we find the idea of simplicity predominant in ancient culture, and the idea of complexity in modern culture.

Ancient and modern art of course sought to embody the tendencies and reflect the features of their respective periods; to give "the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure;" for men sympathize only with what answers to something within themselves, and care not to gaze into a mirror that throws them back the image of another. To facilitate perception, therefore, ancient art stripped things out of their relations, and set them apart in their native distinctness; to facilitate reflection modern art surrounds them with relations and associates them in clusters. In sculpture, accordingly, relations are mostly sacrificed to prominence and distinctness of object; in painting, objects are partly sacrificed to prominence and distinctness of relation. A statue, moreover, is simply *expressive*; means just what meets the eye of the mind; and unfolds all the contents at once to the power of imaginative perception. A picture, on the other hand, is chiefly *significant*; means far more than the mind's eye can comprehend; and unfolds its contents gradually and progressively to the

power of imaginative reflection. This distinction is finely illustrated in the Furies of Eschylus and Shakspeare's Weird Sisters; the power of the former consisting in their looks; of the latter in their words and spells. The Furies are petrific to the senses, and pour all their terror at once upon the eye; the Weird Sisters, almost ludicrous to the sight, are petrific to the thoughts, and exhaust their terror only by exhausting the mind's power to contemplate them.

Now, poetry does with language what sculpture and painting do with forms and colours; the one but expresses in words what the others express in marble and upon canvas. Poetry is the painting and sculpture of speech; painting and sculpture are the poetry of colour and form. A statue is melody petrified; a picture is harmony played to the eye. The Classic drama is such as the ancient sculptors would have written; the Romantic drama is such as the modern painters would have written. In other words, the Classic and Romantic dramas shaped their respective forms according to the laws of ancient and modern art. The one, therefore, aims, as far as possible, to supersede, the other to stimulate, reflection. There every thing gives way to expressiveness, here to significance; that is like sculpture, embodying a precise, definite conception, detached from all external objects and relations; this is like painting, throwing around the principal figure a wide perspective of objects and relations, and gradually melting away into an image of the infinite. In short, while it is the aim of both dramas alike, to represent actions, characters, and passions, the one gives a sculpturesque, the other a picturesque representation of them. The

constituent, then, of the Classic, is expressiveness, of the Romantic, suggestiveness; with the one, objects are interesting in themselves; with the other, for the associations that cluster around them. To understand this, we need but compare the interest we should take in the ruins of Athenian architecture, with the interest the Athenians took in the architecture itself. The object was interesting to them chiefly for what they found in it; it would be interesting to us chiefly for what we brought to it.

In the Classic drama, accordingly, the utmost isolation of object is the law of its structure. The thing is cut out of the relations in which we should naturally view it, and exhibited in its individual, ideal perfection. The work, from the very spirit which prompts and guides its creation, concentrates the utmost power of conception into a simple, definite, regular form, which form is the crystal shrine, the transparent envelope of the conception, rendered perfectly beautiful by the fulness and radiance of the soul it inshrines. It therefore neither requires nor admits any background or perspective at all; for the form contains and reveals the whole object of contemplation, and therefore leaves nothing to fill a background with, or to frame a perspective out of. Suggestive of nothing without, the work aims to withdraw the beholder's thoughts from all other objects, and centre them entirely on itself. Such was the genius of ancient art in all its forms; and in the drama the utmost simplicity of structure and uniformity of elements were the natural consequence. Here the several elements of dramatic representation are obviously required to be kept altogether separate and distinct; to be cut

out, so to speak, from their connection in actual life, and exhibited by themselves; the work allowing no succession or intermixture of tragedy and comedy, scarce any vicissitudes of character, or struggles of conflicting passions and aims.

The Romantic drama, on the contrary, exhibits things, not by themselves, but in their relations, and therefore seeks the utmost association of them into a consistent, harmonious whole. Here the work aims to give a conception, not merely of a precise, definite object, but of all objects, of the whole universe at once. Unable, of course, to *express* such a conception, it strives, as far as possible, to *suggest* it. The form, therefore, is chiefly symbolical or significant of what lies out of itself. Instead of centering the beholder's thoughts on itself, its very aim is to send them away to other things. The work contains not the whole object of contemplation, but only hints and suggestions of that object; its contents are, so to speak, but the lowest link in that infinite chain which reaches to the throne of God, and along which it aspires to direct the thoughts; in short, the work serves but as a window at once inviting and enabling the mind to gaze out into the boundless prospect which encircles it on every side. Along with the objects represented, therefore, it gives the greatest possible distinctness to the manifold infinite relations in which they exist. Instead of exhausting its powers on a few definite forms, and working them up to the highest perfection, it traverses the earth and scales the heavens in quest of images wherewith to express the infinite riches of the soul. Overpowered with its own intense, boundless conceptions, yet unable to express them: ever

striving to body them forth in sensuous imagery which still refuses to contain them,—it resorts to the principle of dramatic perspective, which, blending together the power of innumerable images, and stretching away into dimness and seeming immensity, affords the best, though still imperfect, image of that infinite Beauty which burns before the spirit's vision, but which the whole material universe cannot express. Thus, the work is like a Gothic cathedral or German oratorio, which, from their complexity and irregularity of structure, while they catch the eye or the ear, elevate the thoughts to that infinite heaven of which they speak, and which, overpowering the senses by their vastness and indefiniteness, make the spectator feel his littleness, and even their own littleness, in comparison with the boundless All which they suggest. In this broad, deep complexity, labouring and struggling up into unity, we may recognize the awe-inspiring grandeur and sublimity of Gothic architecture, as distinguished from the airy, cheerful beauty of Classic architecture; a sublimity and beauty corresponding to the sentiments of awe and gladness, which respectively characterize the two religions.

Thus, in the Romantic drama, also, the laws of the work are within the work itself, moulding and determining its shape. The form is the speaking physiognomy, the significant expression of the spirit which builds and inhabits it. In this way alone can art shadow forth that infinitude which is the pervading idea of modern culture. The utmost complexity of structure, the most varied harmony of movement, and the greatest diversity of elements, are essential to the very genius of the work. Here all the elements of dramatic representa-

tion are not only allowed, but sometimes even required freely to interchange and succeed one another; the wildest vicissitudes of character, the fiercest strugglings of passion and clashing of aims being in perfect keeping with the spirit of the work. Comic mirth and tragic seriousness, fierce wars and faithful loves, wooings, weddings, feastings, fightings and funerals, in a word, all the forms and aspects of human life and character may be brought together in the order of their actual existence, and be represented side by side, and arm in arm, in amity or enmity, kissing or killing one another. Hence, while the Classic drama represents an Orestes in the simple character of *son*, possessed by *one* all-controlling passion, and pressing on to the accomplishment of *one* all-absorbing purpose, the Romantic drama represents a Hamlet in the complex character of son, prince, scholar, gentleman, friend and lover, shaken by conflicting passions and distracted by conflicting motives. Whether we regard the individual development or the dramatic combination of action, character and passion, there is, generally, the same simplicity, uniformity and melody in the one drama, and the same complexity, diversity and harmony in the other, as appears in the examples here specified.

It is vain, therefore, to quarrel with the Shakspearian drama for departing from the Classic models. The spirit of modern culture could no more have organized itself into the classic form than the soul of an eagle could organize itself into the form of a fish. If Shakspeare had not departed from those models, his works would not have survived the day of their birth: they would not even have been admitted to a place beside

those models on the student's shelf, but must have gone to the tomb along with the spirit that produced those models. The true business of criticism, it seems to me, is to explain the grounds and principles of that departure, not to quarrel with it; for criticism is not properly the lawgiver, but only the interpreter of art.

It is probably for these reasons that the Classic drama cannot succeed on the modern stage; and that the various attempts which have been made to revive it there, have turned out comparative failures. For its full appreciation a special discipline is required; a discipline possessed only by scholars; so that it can nowhere gather and retain a sufficient audience to bring success. As the ancients generally lacked the right culture to produce or appreciate fine painting; so the moderns generally lack the right culture to produce or appreciate fine sculpture. The former could not have entered into the spirit of modern art; and the latter cannot enter into the spirit of ancient art. And if, once in twenty centuries, a Powers be given us, in whom the genius of old Greece seems risen from the dead; under whose chisel the marble again learns to breathe and blush with life and thought and passion, and waxes eloquent of beauty and of truth,—his works may indeed live in the admiration of a chosen few, but we may rest assured that they will never become objects of a permanent general interest.

SHAKSPEARE'S DISREGARD OF THE UNITIES.

CLOSELY connected with the question I have been discussing, is another which seems to call for a few remarks.

Of the critical rules to which I have so often alluded, probably none caused Shakspeare less trouble, or have caused his critics more trouble, than the far-famed unities of time and place. These rules, too, were generalized from the practice of the ancients, and doubtless legitimately resulted from the spirit of ancient art. For that a person should continue altogether the same character, or subject to the same passion, or absorbed in the same purpose through the space of ten years, appears somewhat unnatural; such a lapse of time almost necessarily drawing on more or less of change or modification in all these respects. A concurrence, or succession, or interchange of various motives and passions, is ordinarily required to bear our nature up and carry it along through a period of many years; and men perpetually engrossed by one and the same motive or passion, though occasionally seen in actual life, are justly regarded as caricatures rather than characters; their nature becoming thwarted, misshapen and disfeatured by such a protracted infringement of its laws. If, therefore, character and passion are to be represented under any single, uniform aspect, the time of the representation must naturally be limited; in other words, unity of time follows from the nature of the work, and, if unity of time, then also unity of place; for it can hardly be expected that a man should be in a great many places, or traverse any considerable portion of the earth in the course of a day. Thus the simplicity of character and passion which marks the Classic drama, is naturally incompatible with any great diversity of time and place. On the other hand, it appears equally unnatural, that a man should undergo many changes of character, or be subject to various passions, or get ab-

sorbed in many purposes the same day ; for as any great lapse of time naturally draws on some change in these respects, so any great change in these respects naturally requires some considerable lapse of time. Wherefore, if character and passion are to be represented under various phases and fluctuations, the time of the representation must needs be lengthened ; the nature of the work obviously requiring a much longer time, a much greater variety of objects and influences, and, consequently, a much wider range of place ; for it seems hardly reasonable that a tragic hero should pass through many eventful years, many sharp trials, and many sad experiences, without going beyond his native village. So that the same principle which, in the Classic drama, required the aforesaid unities to be observed, in the Romantic drama, required them with equal force to be disregarded ; the complexity of the latter, with its implied vicissitudes of character and passion, being naturally incompatible with unity of time and place.

But here again, in respect of these rules, the practice of the ancients may be traced directly to the genius of the ancient religion. Now, their religion, in all its teachings and tendencies, was comparatively a religion of the present. It represented the characters and destinies of men as altogether beyond their own control, or even the control of the gods, and subject only to the immediate, inevitable, and irreversible decrees of fate. It therefore very naturally engrossed their minds, for most part, in present scenes and present transactions. Leaving out of view the past, the future, and the remote, it taught them to contemplate the actions and characters of men simply in and for themselves, without

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regard either to those of other men, or to others of the same men. As, according to their belief, they had no hand in shaping their own characters and destinies, so it was their sole business to know and enjoy the present, leaving the future and the distant entirely to those awful beings whom no actions of theirs could either irritate or propitiate. Under, indeed, and within the decrees of fate, certain liberties were allowed to the gods and even to themselves; but these liberties related only to present transactions, and did not extend over distant or ultimate results. In a word, it was simply a *here* and a *now*, cut out of the infinite extent and duration in which we are taught chiefly to contemplate them. In this idea, then, simply of a *here* and a *now*, abstracted as much as possible from all local and temporal relations, we have, along with the sculpturesque spirit of ancient art, the unities of time and place as its natural accompaniments and conditions.

I probably need not say the genius and tendency of the Christian religion are almost entirely the reverse of all this. Here the past with its remembrances, the future with its anticipations, and the distant with its claims, its relations and interests, are constantly mingling with and modifying our present thoughts and present pursuits. We are not taught to regard what and where we are, simply or chiefly in and for themselves, but in connection with the eternity and immensity which surround them; for in themselves they are as nothing, and derive their chief importance from their relation to what and where we have been, and to what and where we shall be. The mysteries of our origin, our being, and our destiny are thus made to impress themselves upon

our hourly contemplations ; so that the whole of our existence is concentrated, as it were, into every part, and every part is in turn extended throughout the whole. Our earthly visible life is but an insignificant fragment of an endless existence, refracted, as it were, into visibility ; and even where it passes beyond our power of vision we are taught to follow it by the power of imaginative reflection. Thus the now and the here dwindle into mere points in the boundless extent and duration which crowd themselves into our thoughts. The present with its interests and enjoyments does not suffice us. To see actions and characters by themselves is not enough ; we must see them in their causes and their consequences. Where we are is but a trifle compared to whence we came, and whither we are going. We live not in what we have, but in what we remember and what we hope. Our destinies are in our own hands ; and our all-important concern is, to shape them according to our desires. Such, as you all know, is the genius of modern culture. The ideas of eternity and immensity, with their infinite hopes and fears, lie at the bottom of all our serious instructions and contemplations. Here, then, we have along with the picturesque spirit of modern art, an absolute merging of the unities of time and place in the far higher unity of intellectual and moral existence ; an existence having nothing to do with time and place, save as the fleeting vesture in which it clothes itself. Events, and actions, and characters, however remote from each other in time and place, are brought together, and viewed in the relations of cause and effect, of condition, and dependence, and reciprocal influence.

In the Romantic drama, therefore, the unities of time and place must obviously give way to higher and more important relations. To see things by themselves does not meet the demands of modern culture ; we must see them in their vital and essential relations ; and whether they be twenty miles or twenty years asunder matters not, provided they be really related in this way. Here, therefore, these far-famed unities have nothing whatever to do, save as an altogether subordinate concern. Accordingly, Shakspeare everywhere played such fantastic tricks with them as did not fail to make the critics stare. He did not scruple to take his audience over large portions of Europe, and through long periods of time in the course of the same play. From this circumstance some have conjectured that he did not know of the unities at all. They seem to have forgotten that he was the intimate friend of Ben Jonson, who understood the unities as well as Aristotle himself did, and who did his utmost to enforce them on the English stage. The truth is, Shakspeare understood them perfectly ; but he knew there were more things in heaven and earth than were ever dreamt of in the philosophy either of those who preached, or of those who practised them. He knew precisely what they were good for, and what they were not good for, as is evident from the fact that he always observed them just so far and no farther than the nature of his subject required. He not only saw them indeed, but saw round them and through them into regions of which neither Aristotle nor Jonson ever dreamed ; and the wonderful insight which caught the true genius of modern culture, and anticipated the demands of modern

art, as much surpassed the conceptions of his critics as his practice differed from their precepts.

It is true, Shakspeare wrote for the stage as well as the closet, and therefore had to maintain the probability, or at least the possibility, necessary to scenic illusion. All this, too, he understood as well as any other mortal, and, what is more, he did it better than any other mortal. For, as some one has said, in his hands, the wildest and wonderfulest dreams become more probable, than the commonest forms of life do in the hands of almost any body else. In other words, he gives more seeming reality to what cannot be, than others give to what is. Shakspeare evidently knew both his audience and himself; what they would ask, and what he could give. He knew they did not visit the theatre to learn geography or chronology, but to see a vivid, truthful, lifelike representation of action, character, and passion; that they brought intellects and imaginations as well as senses; and that, if he could not in all cases supply adequate scenery to the latter, he could at least silence their questionings, and raise the former into domination over them. In short, he wrote, as he himself knew very well, for spectators, for men, not for mere geographical and chronological critics. But, though he had in view the stage as the exhibitory scene of his delineations, he knew their real scene was and ought to be the sphere of universal humanity. Into that sphere he aimed to transport, and did transport the minds of his audience. He made the stage, what very few others have made it, a place to exhibit what did, or might, or should occur in God's world, and in the mind of man; and if he could not annihilate the visible con-

traditions of the theatrical whereabout, he knew he could cause those contradictions to be lost or forgotten in the surpassing truth, and life, and coherency of his representations. In doing all this, he showed himself the skilfulest of artists as well as the profoundest of philosophers; and his achievements are not more astonishing than his plans were judicious.

LECTURE V.

SHAKSPEARE'S ALLEGED WANT OF TASTE—HIS FEMALE CHARACTERS.

IN my last lecture I endeavoured to vindicate Shakspeare from the criticisms of the dissecting school, touching the principle and method of his productions. That Shakspeare developed his subjects organically and according to their innate laws, not according to any system of external rules, was spoken of as the crowning excellence of his works. If, therefore, in this respect, he had not offended the critics in question, his works had been comparatively worthless.

But perhaps the greatest perplexity with these critics was, how to account for the brotherhood between the wonderful excellencies which they acknowledged, and the wonderful faults which they censured. How a mind capable of such exalted beauties should have been betrayed into such shocking deformities, was indeed a problem of no very easy solution. Unable to disentangle the knot which themselves had made, they were obliged to devise some theoretic knife wherewith to cut it asunder. The readiest, perhaps the rationalest way that occurred to them was, to attribute the acknowledged beauties to an astonishing power of genius; the alleged defects, to an equally astonishing want of taste. They thus resorted to an imaginary opposition between genius

and taste, as if these powers might, perhaps must be, in inverse proportion. Akin to this idea, or rather, another phase of the same thing, was the notion, that the excellencies were due to occasional gusts of inspiration; the faults to a prevailing lack of judgment. They accordingly spoke of Shakspeare as a wayward, thoughtless being, who wanted as much of judgment as he had of genius; who, in the words of Hume, "frequently hits as if by inspiration, a striking peculiarity of sentiment adapted to a single character, but whose want of judgment gives way only by intervals to irradiations of genius." Here, again, is assumed a sort of antithesis between genius and intellect, as though genius, instead of being in a greater or less degree the harmony of all the faculties, were a distinct faculty of the mind, which might, and in Shakspeare did, exist in so great a degree as to exclude the others.

With such freedom have critics made reprisals on Shakspeare's intellect, as if to indemnify themselves for his superiority of genius. Thus has the greatest of poets been turned into a sort of Balaam's-ass, who sometimes indeed gave forth true revelations, but who, as soon as the fit of inspiration was over, again became as asinine as ever. This theory constantly vitiates their criticisms, and perplexes their readers; a theory unsupported by facts or philosophy; and which, instead of explaining a single supposed inconsistency, is itself inconsistent with all experience. Fixed to this point, these critics sometimes vibrate, like an electrical pendulum, from positive to negative pole,—sometimes hang, like Mahomet's coffin, between opposite attractions. Swinging to and fro between the extremes of censure and praise,

each movement contradicts the preceding one ; and the result of their different conclusions comes out simple zero. In following their criticisms the course of the reader's thoughts is not unlike Satan's journey through Chaos to the shores of the new creation.

“ Now his sail-broad vans
He spreads for flight, and, in the surging smoke
Uplifted, spurns the ground ; thence many a league,
As in a cloudy chair, ascending, rides
Audacious ; then, unwares, plumb down he drops
Ten thousand fathoms deep ; and to this hour
Down had been falling, had not, by ill chance,
The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud,
Instinct with fire and nitre, hurried him
As many miles aloft.”

Often does the reader seem about to enter the gate of Shakspeare's paradise,

“ When, lo !
A violent cross wind from either coast
Blows him transverse, ten thousand leagues awry
Into the devious air ;”

and after being tossed awhile from one extreme to another by antithetic winds, he comes to the conclusion that nothing can be concluded on the subject. For a long time was Shakspeare whirled round and round in the same place by this eddy of criticism, until Lessing, Goëthe, and Schlegel, in Germany, and at the same time Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb, in England, stepped to his relief ; and among literary men this style of criticism has now become nearly as unfashionable as it is absurd.

It is not easy, perhaps not worth the while, to determine what these critics mean by taste. If by taste be meant a quick, keen perception, and a deep, steadfast love of truth, and fitness, and order, it is inseparable, nay, it is scarcely distinguishable from genius; or rather, both are one and the same power, now seen in creative transport, now, in elective energy. In the words of Schlegel, "genius is the almost unconscious choice of the highest degree of excellence, and, consequently, it is taste in its greatest perfection." In this sense, taste views a work of art in its unity and integrity, and estimates the details by the principle that combines and organizes them. Viewed, therefore, in reference to the artist, taste necessarily implies truth, and clearness, and justness of conception, selecting and adapting means for its fullest and faithfulest manifestation. But if, by taste, be meant mere facility and accuracy in adjusting the details of a work of art to a preconcerted system of rules, it may be only another name for gentle dulness and elegant absurdity. In this sense the greatest dunces, as might be expected, have sometimes shown the most taste; for, incapable of originating a conception of a vital whole, or of moulding and assimilating the parts into an organic unity of effect, such minds can render the logical, or rather, mechanical adjustment of the parts the more perfect. The outward looks thus come off the more finished, because there is nothing but looks; the thing seems better, for that it has nothing to do but seem; just as the wax figure of a person may be more regular and correct than any real living person; or as a man may seem more pious outwardly when, nay, *because* he has no inward piety at all.

Shakspeare, for example, sometimes falls into a confusion of metaphors, but never into a confusion of thought ; in nine cases out of ten the thought is but the more clear and distinct for that very confusion. Pope, on the other hand, never falls into a confusion of metaphors, but sometimes into an inextricable confusion of thought. Yet Pope, in the sense last stated, had the better taste ; but then the question occurs, if such be the nature of taste, what is it good for ? It is simply a convenient hack-log, whereon connoisseurs may chop critical logic, and perhaps cut off some part of the crown due only to genius, to cover their own baldness. In this sense, too, the dignified, make-believe crystallizations of character in Mrs. More's tragedies show more taste than the baby-heroic, yet genuine, life-breathing characters in Shakspeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. The misfortune, however, is, that the former, in their stiff, lifeless regularity, are no characters at all, but mere names set before pieces of starched and painted rhetoric ; while the latter are real, though not very dignified, living men, struck off with that mixture of irony and caricature, with which a mind like Shakspeare's would naturally regard such chivalrous blusterers about their own honour. On the whole, we may safely assert, that if taste mean but a paltry popinjay connoisseurship of form, which puts the soul of a work of art into its clothes, or rather, which fritters away the soul in mere nicety of dress, then no man never had less taste than Shakspeare : but if taste mean simply an eye to see, a heart to feel, and a tongue to utter the truth, the beauty, and the life of nature and of man, then Shakspeare's taste indefinitely surpasses that of any other man who has ever written.

In works, however, where some portion of genius must be acknowledged, there are sometimes extravagances and incongruities which more or less disfigure the workmanship. A good degree of creative power may doubtless co-exist with a lack of that clear, penetrating vision which discerns at once the fitness or unfitness of means to ends. In such cases there may be a want of correspondence between the parts and the whole. Though the general conception be vivid and distinct, the details of the work may not all harmonize with it, may not seem to grow up naturally and vitally out of it, or be moulded by it, but rather to be glued, or nailed, or plastered on; so that they not only express nothing themselves, but even mar the expressiveness of other parts. Sentiment sometimes intoxicates itself into maudlin sentimentality; gentleness sometimes collapses into effeminacy, speaking through closed lips, and languishing away into sighs and soft looks, as if trying to "die of a rose in aromatic pain;" humour sometimes degenerates into blackguard or buffoonery, provoking laughter indeed, but the laughter of contempt rather than of sympathy; strength sometimes evaporates off into bombast, or lashes itself into violence and grim-visaged fury, tearing a passion to tatters, and jerking the mind aloft only to let it fall lower than before, instead of giving it wings to rise gradually yet securely of itself. In place of the simply natural; genius, though of an inferior order, sometimes aspires to the unnatural, or anti-natural, or supernatural, as if nature were not good enough for its purpose. Hence we have exhibitions of passion overshooting their aims, and defeating themselves by their excess. Hence, also, we have represen-

tations of action and character darkening themselves by the very means that ought to make them clearer ; representations in which, like Gonzalo's commonwealth, the end seems to have forgotten the beginning, or the beginning seems not to have thought of the end ; where, in effect, the actions and characters, instead of being harmoniously developed in the progress of the work, are metamorphosed, and come out the reverse of what they began. It is not uncommon, moreover, for pathos to exaggerate itself, so as to cause a revulsion in our sympathies, and awaken feelings the opposite of what are attempted to be expressed ; sometimes dwelling upon the exciting of pity until it outlives the tears itself has moved ; sometimes spoiling the effect of a good blow by repeating it, until it stuns the feelings it wishes to arouse. From ambition, genius sometimes aspires to lead the multitude by outstripping them in their own path, and, instead of remanding them to the pure fountains of nature, electioneers them with intoxicating draughts ; sometimes, from vanity, it stimulates itself into convulsions by respiring an atmosphere overcharged with oxygen ; sometimes, from other causes, its pulse is quickened into morbid activity, and it goes into writhings and spasms instead of healthful exhibitions of native strength. And finally, genius, and high genius too, may sometimes display actions and characters which, however natural and true in themselves, are not fit subjects for exhibition, inasmuch as the contemplation of them is attended with an overbalance of pain or disgust.

Such are some examples of genius going above, or below, or beside nature, instead of meeting and embracing her ; examples wherein art appears exhibiting itself,

instead of hiding itself in the truth and simplicity with which it exhibits other things. But though such distortions, and affectations, and absurdities be sometimes the offspring of genius, they come of genius obeying other laws than those within itself, and listening to other dictates than those of its inward sense; or else of genius struggling through manifold obstructions, and too short-sighted to grasp its just aims, or too dim-sighted to distinguish its appropriate means. But while such things evince a want of taste, they evince an equal want of depth and purity of intellect. I called them the offspring of genius; it were probably more correct to call them the offspring of great talents; for they obviously spring from the excess of some powers over others, thus evincing the want of that fine harmony and proportion of all the faculties, which, more perhaps than any thing else, distinguishes genius from talent.

That Shakspeare is always free from these faults, correctly enough denominated bad taste, it were doubtless too much to assert. Yet these are among the very things with which he, of all men, is the least chargeable. If, however, we perversely take the wrong point of view, we can doubtless find faults enough in Shakspeare, as we can in every thing else. If, for example, we assume that it was his business to execute our purposes, or the purposes we think he ought to have formed, instead of forming and executing his own purposes, as he has done, though we may not be able to discover faults to others, we can certainly make them for ourselves in abundance. Or if, instead of penetrating to the centre of his productions, and viewing the parts as irradiations from it, we occupy ourselves on the outside, measuring the

parts with our critical rules, and comparing them with our critical standards, his works will appear but bundles of defects; and they would be good for nothing if they should not appear so. And such, in truth, has been the case with nearly all those learned dissectors, who have brought the tools of the critical fraternity to the work of curtailng the redundancies, of expanding the deficiencies, and of straightening the obliquities, which they of course did not fail to find in all needful profusion; for whoever comes to nature, or to Shakspeare, who has been called another nature, as a teacher, not as a pupil, may be sure of having enough to do. One would really think, however, that we had better see Shakspeare before we undertake to oversee him; and that if we would see *him*, it were best not to study him with a looking-glass before us.

It is not always easy for people to distinguish between the faults of a character represented, and the faults of the representation itself. Of course Shakspeare was not always bound to conceive good characters, but only to give good delineations of those he did conceive in the relations in which he conceived them. Accordingly his characters are often far enough from being perfect in themselves; but no one has yet pointed out an instance wherein he has failed to give a faithful representation of the characters such as they are. It is not difficult, for example, to find fault with Hamlet, as Dr. Johnson has done; that he has not sufficient force of will, and provokes actions against himself, instead of acting out his designs on others. But the truth is, such was the very sort of character which, in this instance, Shakspeare chose to represent; a character full of

greatness indeed, but rendered inefficient by that very greatness ; whose force of will is defeated by the restless activity of a powerful intellect ; and whose sleepless anxiety not to do wrong prevents his *doing* any thing. It is easy, too, to quarrel with Othello, that a dark-skinned hero and a snow-white heroine should appear together "linked in happy nuptial league," so much against the dictates of custom and propriety. Here, again, the very aim of the poet was to exhibit female purity triumphing over all outward incongruities, and seeing her husband's visage in his mind, instead of losing the brightness of his spirit in the darkness of its tenement ; so that we might be induced to approve a choice which we have not the virtue to make from the purity and gentleness of her who makes it. The triumph of the work is, that we see, for the time, with Desdemona's eyes, think with her thoughts, become animated with her pure and exalted feelings ; and our hearts in their temporary identification with hers, are "subdued even to the very quality of her lord ;" just as, in reading *Paradise Lost*, we contemplate the unfallen lovers walking through Eden in their naked innocence, or "imparadised in one another's arms," without the least impure thought or emotion, because the poet endows us for the time with paradisaical senses, and causes us to regard the lovers as they regard each other. If, again, the characters of Edmund and those tiger-like daughters in *Lear* be taken out of their vital connection in the play, and contemplated by themselves, they exhibit a mass of spiritual deformity which the heart instinctively loathes, and the head instinctively abominates. Viewed by itself, such superhuman depravity rather shocks and disgusts than de-

lights and instructs us. And yet, in the play, it is all cheerfully endured, and even welcomed, for the almost adorable beauty which it is not only the occasion of developing in others, but also sets off with the advantage of the most powerful yet most natural contrast.

Surely all this manifests, not a want of taste, but a conscious plenitude of power, boldly venturing upon the most obstinate materials, and reconciling to the highest taste subjects which would have appeared frightful or loathsome in almost any other hands. None, perhaps, but Shakspeare, could have managed such materials in keeping with good taste ; and if, separating his boldness of plan from his power of execution, we re-fashion his materials into such shape as some vastly inferior genius might have left them in, of course they will not fail to evince bad taste enough. Such, indeed, is the miracle of genius, venturing in its calm, quiet plenipotence amid the ruins of fallen humanity, knowing it can create a paradise out of them ; and traversing the most desolate places of human nature, in the full assurance that it can make them bud and blossom like the rose.

But, not to dwell on particular instances, if Shakspeare's works be really wanting in taste, or judgment, we may probably best discover that want by considering them generally, either as delineations of character, or as expressions of passion. Now, it is quite notorious, that in Shakspeare, incomparably more than in almost any other writer, every thing appears to come, not from him, but from the characters ; and from the characters, too, speaking not as authors, but simply as men. Doubtless this appearance could not be, but that the word is everywhere most admirably suited to the character, the

character to the word ; every thing being exactly in its place, and exactly fitted to its place. In his works it is extremely hard to discover any thing “overdone, or come tardy off;” any thing from or beside the purpose in hand ; he never appears to say a thing merely or mainly for the purpose of saying it ; never, so far as we can see, lets in any thing that hinders the matter, nor leaves out anything that would help the matter. In other words, his delineations almost uniformly combine, in an unrivalled degree, the three qualities of clearness, precision and completeness ; insomuch that it is scarcely possible to add, or alter, or take away, without in some way marring the effect. Doubtless many things, considered by themselves, might be bettered ; but it is not for themselves that he uses them, but only as characteristic of the persons from whom they proceed ; and the fact of their seeming to proceed from the persons, not from him, is the best possible proof of his good judgment in using them. Hence it is, that in reading his works we never think of him, but only of what he is describing ; we can hardly realize his existence, his individuality is so lost in the objects and characters he brings before us. He seems, indeed, to have passed entirely out of himself into his conceptions ; or rather, to have been nothing in himself, but every thing his characters were or could become. That he should have known so perfectly how to avoid giving too much or too little, and that he should have let out and drawn in the reins at the precise time and place where the subject required ; this, as it evinces an almost inconceivable delicacy of mind, so it is one of the points wherein Shakspeare is most without a rival.

But Shakspeare not only so disposes the transpirations of character, that the principle out of which those transpirations proceed, shines out freely and clearly through them; but, which is still more decisive of good judgment, he so arranges the several characters of a play as that they may best draw out each other by mutual influences, and set off each other by mutual contrasts. And perhaps the most wonderful thing in his works is the exquisite congruity of what comes from his persons, with all the circumstances and influences under which they are represented as acting. It seems, indeed, as if "he had but to think of a thing, in order to become that thing, and all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived a character, whether actual or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded by all the same objects, subject to the same skyey influences, the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents, as would occur in reality." It is true, Shakspeare's persons, like those in real life, act so chiefly because they are so; but he unfolds so clearly what they are in the outset that we can almost foresee what they will do, as fast as the circumstances emerge wherein they are to act. So perfectly does he seize and impart the principle or germ of a character, along with the appropriate conditions of its development, that all the results seem to follow of their own accord; and the reader feels, that if he had himself been originally the same and in the same condition, he could not or would not have acted otherwise. Thus, in Shakspeare's delineations, every thing is fitted to every other thing; so that each requires and infers the others,

and all hang together in most natural coherence and congruity. And this agreeing fitness, this conjunctive reciprocity between the several parts and particulars of a work, this happy adjustment of each to all, and of all to each, so that nothing jars, or falls out, or flies off from the purpose ;—this is the very thing, above all others, which it is the office of taste or judgment to superintend.

It is on this point that Shakspeare has suffered most from a narrow, creeping criticism ; for if his critics have seldom risen to the reconception of a character as a whole, they have still more seldom risen to the reconception of a drama as a whole ; while to the genial and uncritical reader, his plays appear so much the spontaneous work of nature, that he thinks not of the fulness of design that pervades them. Thus the profound skill and wisdom of the poet are often lost in the consummate perfection of the work. Accordingly he has sometimes been represented as a sort of inspired and infallible idiot, who practised a species of poetical magic without knowing what he did or why he did it ; who achieved the greatest wonders of art, not by rational insight and design, but by a series of lucky accidents and *lapsus naturæ* ; who, in short, went through life stumbling upon divinities and blundering into miracles. His pen worked so divinely that it seemed to go itself ; therefore, argue some, he himself had no hand in moving it. This is like the reasoning of certain 'atheists, who, from the perfection of nature have argued against the existence of nature's Author. What proceeds from divine foresight and election is thus referred to chance, because of the very fitness and order pervading its movements ; as

if, because a machine worked so well as to conceal the hand that made and moved it, we should infer that it made and moved itself. Such reasoning cannot be better answered than in the words of Schiller:—

“Him,
The Almighty Artist, we behold not : calm,
He veils himself in universal laws :
These, and not him, the sceptic seeing, exclaims,
‘Wherefore a God ? the world doth need no God !’
And ne’er did Christian’s praise more honour Him,
Than doth this sneering sceptic’s blasphemy.”

But it is probably in the handling of passion that a want of taste, if it existed, would be most likely to discover itself. For it requires the happiest balance and proportion of faculties to seize a great passion without being carried away by it. With most men deep strong emotion throws the intellect into tumult and confusion, and thus precludes the keen, watchful discernment whose office it is to perceive and maintain the fitnesses and correspondencies of things. Where this is the case, we naturally have personifications of passion rather than impassioned persons ; that is, the character, instead of being developed and revealed through the passion, is obscured or distorted by it. Hence it is, probably, that authors, said by some to have more taste but less genius than Shakspeare, have so often exhibited passions without any character to support them. In such exhibitions the passion has nothing to be true to, and therefore cannot be untrue ; cleaving to no substantial form, freed from all law, and left to its own caprice, it can take all sorts of inexplicable turns and fantastic shapes with per-

fect propriety. For passion is secured against the possibility of becoming unreasonable or incongruous when disjoined from character ; it knows no law, can fall into no unfitnesses or extravagancies, when viewed apart from individual beings. For example, the love of Arbaces, in Beaumont and Fletcher's *King and no King*, may be any body's, or every body's, or nobody's love indifferently ; for Arbaces is no person, and has no character for the passion to agree with. It is circumscribed by no individuality, and therefore can violate no law. It is useless going about to account for its origin, or to trace its progress, for it exists purely by chance, and acts purely by caprice. We may call it in good taste if we please, but there is really no taste about it. On the other hand, in such a being as Shakspeare's Imogen, the love must be Imogen's, and hers alone. It is strictly bound down by her personality. Should it cease or forget to be hers, and attempt to become Portia's, or Perdita's, or Rosalind's, it would simply be nobody's, and in its characterless freedom, might assume as many shapes as Proteus had without any offence to propriety. But as it is, the passion and character cannot be developed, cannot even exist apart from each other. Should the former become more, or less, or other than sorts with the latter ; should either overpass or fall short of the law of their combined individuality, the vital harmony between them would be broken up ; and both would diverge into lifeless abstractions, without any hold on our sympathies, or any instruction for our minds.

This same exquisite fitness and proportion between the character and passion might easily be shown in almost any one of Shakspeare's persons. He has given

nearly all the imaginable forms, and degrees, and vicissitudes of human passion ; yet I am not aware that any example of unfitness or disproportion has ever been successfully pointed out in his works. From the fantastic affectation and madcap capriciousness of Petruchio, to the terrible explosions of passion in Lear and Othello, all come from him with equal truth and propriety. So perfect always is the correspondence between the passion and the character, and so freely and fitly does the former grow out of the circumstances wherein the latter is placed, that, the character and circumstances being known, we never have any difficulty in justifying or accounting for the passion expressed. As a natural consequence, the passion is always strictly characteristic, and pervaded with the individuality of the person from whom it comes. It is therefore impossible, by any process whatever, to separate or commute them ; no other forms of passion can proceed from the character ; no other forms of character can support the passion. In a word, the two are perfectly grown together, perfectly organized into one substance ; so that, like the brain and heart of a man, neither can exist save in vital union with the other. This holds true, not only of different passions, but of different modifications of the same passion. For example, his forms of love are just as various and distinct as the characters in which he has exhibited it. The loves of Miranda, Juliet and Ophelia, and of Ferdinand, Romeo and Hamlet, are just as different as the characters themselves. The madness of Timon is no more like that of Lear than Timon himself is like Lear. The ambition of Macbeth and Richard, the pride of Coriolanus and Bertram, the re-

morse of Lady Macbeth and Iachimo, are marked with all the individuality of their respective subjects. Another consequence of the same thing is, that we never meet in Shakspeare with any of those sudden, unexpected, and unaccountable bursts of passion which, in other writers, so often stun or scare away the sympathies instead of enlisting them. He unfolds a passion in its rise and progress, in its turns and vicissitudes, its ebbings and flowings, so that we go along with it freely and naturally from its origin to its consummation. Even when, as in the case of Ferdinand and Miranda, or of Romeo and Juliet, he ushers in the passion at its full height, he so contrives to throw the mind back or around upon various predisposing causes and circumstances, as to generate a spontaneous concurrence of our feelings with the whole representation. Now, in this intuitive perception of the precise kind and degree of passion and character that are suited to each other; in this quick, sure insight of the internal workings of a given mind, and the why, and when, and how far, it should be moved; and in this accurate letting out and curbing in of a passion, precisely as the law of its individuality requires,—in all this Shakspeare has shown himself as much superior to other writers in taste and judgment as he is in genius.

Shakspeare, it is true, often lays upon us burdens of passion which would not be borne in any other writer. But, dark and terrible as are the tempests of soul which he pourtrays, the mind is never wearied by them; and whether he wrings the heart with pity, or freezes the blood with terror, or fires the soul with indignation, the genial reader rises from his pages refreshed rather than

exhausted. The reason of which is, instruction keeps pace with excitement; he strengthens the mind in proportion as he loads it. He has been called the great master of human passion; doubtless she is so; but it were more correct to call him the great master of every thing human: for he makes us think as intensely as he requires us to feel; and while opening the deepest fountains of the human heart, he at the same time unfolds the highest energies of the human mind. Nay, with such consummate art does he manage the fiercest workings of passion, that in a healthy mind the witnessing of them is always attended with an overbalance of pleasure. The blacker the cloud he gathers about us the brighter the rainbow he paints upon it. With the very storms and whirlwinds of passion he so blends the softening and alleviating influences of poetry, that while stirring the soul to its inmost depths, they in nowise bring distress. For while, as a philosopher, he surpassed all other philosophers in power to discern the passions of men; as an artist, he also surpassed all other artists in skill

“ So to temper passion, that our ears
Take pleasure in their pain, and eyes in tears
Both weep and smile.”

But there is one point wherein I suspect the charge of bad taste must, in some sort, be admitted against Shakspeare. I allude to the artificial conceits, the plays upon words, and the apparent verbal affectations in which he so freely and frequently indulges. I say apparent affectations, for whether they be really such or not, they are certainly apt to seem such. And for the same reason if Lady Jane Grey, or the Countess of Pem-

broke, or Lord Bacon's mother, should by some miracle appear in our midst, habited as they were in life, their dresses would doubtless seem affected to us, and ours would seem equally so to them; and yet these noble women were probably as incapable of real affectation, as of anticipating our fashions, and wearing our clothes.

Now, there are fashions in speech as well as in dress, and that fashions in both should pass away and be forgotten, is a matter of course; they would not be fashions if they did otherwise. What was fashionable, therefore, and in very good taste in Shakspeare's time, might be unfashionable, and in very bad taste, now. The fashions of that age may seem foolish and affected enough to us, and ours may seem equally so two hundred years hence. Perhaps it is for this reason that those people who look no deeper than dress, either of body or mind, and who make it their being's end and aim, to wear clothes, and look sleek, and be fashionable, are always thinking that human improvement is now in its quickest march, and that the present has first exemplified the perfection of human reason.

To return; there is one sort of taste which is grounded only on conventionalities; and there is another sort which is grounded deep in the nature of things. The former of course changes as customs change; the latter changes only with nature; a change which Shakspeare proves not to have occurred for three hundred, and Homer for three thousand years. How often customs have changed within the same period, we only know that we are ignorant, and are willing to remain so. Every-body knows, however, or ought to know, that verbal conceits and plays upon words were the uni-

versal custom in Shakspeare's time. From the king on the throne and the chancellor on the woolsack, to the cook in the kitchen and the groom in the stable, the mouths of all overflowed with them. That Shakspeare knew they were but a fashion of age, which, like all other fashions, was worthless in itself and must soon pass away, is evident from the remarks about it which he occasionally puts into the mouth of his characters. But he was obliged to use some sort of dress; and he did not choose in all cases to reject the fashions of his time, because he regarded all fashions as alike indifferent. In short, Shakspeare knew well enough, that truth and nature, though often with fashion, are never of it; and that true taste would never reject them, nor false taste ever receive them, in whatever style they might be dressed.

In this sense, then, and in this sense alone, can the charge of bad taste be maintained against Shakspeare. And in this sense I am perfectly content to let the charge stand; for whether true or not, it certainly is not worth refuting, nor worth establishing. But the charge has now come to be equally good against those who were loudest in urging it against him. Of all the English poets, Pope was for a long time thought by Shakspeare's critics to have the best taste. The creamy smoothness, however, and monotonous elegance of Pope, the qualities upon which their opinion was chiefly based, long ago passed out of fashion, and are now justly thought to be in worse taste even than Shakspeare's plays upon words. Nevertheless, Pope's sterling perpetual good sense, and his vigorous compact expression, are now as good, and perhaps better appreciated than

they were when he was crowned king of taste ; and whatever may be the opinion as to his poetical genius, all must acknowledge him a man of the most solid understanding, the most disagreeable temper, and the most stinging wit.

But the great stress laid upon taste by a certain class of men is significant of something more, perhaps, than is generally supposed. A vigorous healthy mind is chiefly concerned with the truth of things ; accepts or rejects according as it finds them true or false : a pampered, sickly mind, incapable of so high a question, sets up a petty baby-house controversy about taste. So true is this that the phrase, good taste, has come to mean little else than a diseased appetite for things that afford no nutriment ; a condition in which the mind, unequal to the digestion of old truth, goes chasing after novel combinations and elegant shams. People in this state do not want any thing to feed the mind, but something to trim it up for show : of course, therefore, they prefer gaudy imitations of jewelry to good beef-steaks. Having but little life and a good deal of vanity to support, they leave the dinners and take to the decorations. Hence the charge of bad taste against Shakspeare has often fallen most on what is fullest of truth. Those who made it had got so refined as to prefer gilded bubbles to masses of native gold, inasmuch as the bubbles, while costing much less, could be carried much easier. And perhaps it is for the same reason, that to a class of minds not entirely extinct even now, appearances are so much more acceptable than realities. The truth is, realities being solid, are too heavy for them to lift ; while appear-

ances, being hollow and light, are much better adapted to their powers, or rather, to their want of power.

Truth is something objective and external to the mind ; a thing therefore about which we can agree, and by which we may be tired : taste is altogether subjective ; a matter of individual palate, or whim, or custom, wherein every man is a standard unto himself. In a word, every man has his own taste ; no man has his own truth ; for the same truth exists for all ; binds all ; is a common test and measure of the worth of all. Of course we all have our crotchets and caprices, and will never be fully satisfied save with what reflects them. These it was Shakspeare's business to correct, not to cherish : he wrote for the universal mind and heart of man, not for our individual likes and dislikes ; and when he crosses these, is it his truth that sins against us, or our taste that sins against him ? Let us frankly confess then, that we do not suit him ; and not nurse our defects by charging him with bad taste, while, perhaps, the more he had squared with our taste, the more he had clashed with every-body's else. Good taste comes, if it come at all, included in something better than itself, and unless we aim at something higher than good taste, we shall not get even that ; for taste regards but the surface of things ; and nothing is in worse taste than, what men of mere taste usually prefer, surface unsupported by substance. On the other hand, by aiming at the greater, we compass the less without knowing it or before we know it ; for we cannot very well have substance without having some kind of surface along with it ; and any kind of surface well supported is better than the best of surfaces without support. Nay more, the

unsupported surface is considerably worse than nothing ; for it fills without feeding the mind ; bloweth up, not buildeth up ; and, by inflating, enfeebles the mind. A straw fire in the night may be a very pretty thing ; but it only sets people to running after it, and then dies out by the time they get there, thus leaving them more in the dark than they were before.

And does the critic still keep urging, study good taste, study good taste ? Well now, my sapient critic, I have heard enough of this cant about taste. Of all the cants that ever were canted this really seems to me the most unprofitable. I will venture to say it is in far worse taste even than any thing to be found in Shakspeare. If your own taste were good for much, I suspect it would set you to thinking and speaking less about taste, and more about truth. Aim at good taste ? Nay, aim at truth, and I'll risk but that your taste will be good enough. At all events if truth be not in good taste, then I for one have small care for good taste ; and if you will only give me plenty of that, whether it be done in good taste or not, is not of the slightest consequence. And can you not recognize and receive truth unless she come in a shape precisely suited to your fashions and idiosyncrasies ? Then you care more for the form than for the life it inshrines, and therefore lack the first principle of good taste ; and until disciplined into better taste, I fear you will only use what taste you have as a covering for inaptitudes and frivolities. For example, the sham architecture, now so much in vogue among us, where certain appearances are kept up without any corresponding reality, do you call that in good taste ? If so, then I answer, the thing is all outside ; a piece of hypocrisy

done up in plaster ; a thing that is continually telling lies ; lies that are listened to without even the merit of being believed ; a thing that could have risen into favour only in a degenerate age ; and whose degeneracy is nowhere shown more conspicuously than in the excessive stress that is laid upon taste. What is the use of prating about good taste when the thing is acknowledged to be a lie, a sham ; and is even delighted in partly because it is a sham ? Why inquire whether a man be a gentleman or not so long as he is confessedly not a man ? Is a falsehood or nihility any the better for being gilded or varnished, so as to tickle the eye while starving the soul ?

Nature sets us no example like this ; such is not her way. There is no straining after effect with her ; no effort to bring down the house ; tricks, shams, surfaces, keeping up appearances, form no part of her system. Modest, unaffected, earnest, sparing of show, profuse of life, tenacious of truth, she always performs much more than she promises ; even when she puts forth a fair surface, it is only to invite and allure the mind to something still fairer beneath ; for if truth, if life can mould dull matter into forms of beauty, how much more beautiful must be the truth, the life itself ! Always careful to seem less than she is, to show less than she has, nature therefore always improves on acquaintance ; and so does every thing else that is worth becoming acquainted with. And to the unspoiled eye there is really more of good taste, because more of truth, in the freedoms, and negligencies, and homely solidities of nature, than in all the starched and crimped formalities and superficial niceties of the most delicate mental valetudinarianism.

To conclude: a thing without life may be polished easily enough; but in case of a living thing, as fast as the polish is rubbed on the life is rubbed out. To praise the one on the score of good taste, or to censure the other on the score of bad taste, is quite useless; for if the thing be true, it is above the censure of taste; if false, it is not worth the censure of taste. The fact is, the living, truthful thing is not responsible to any such tribunal; the court of taste has no jurisdiction over it; all the shame and all the blame must light on those who have the impotence to dislike it: the polished, lifeless thing, is responsible nowhere; wants, indeed, the very principle in which responsibility inheres; an elegant corpse it may be, but is bound, nevertheless, to be buried somewhere; if not in the earth, then in oblivion: for the thing *is* nothing, but only seems; and whatever does nothing but seem, must of course soon cease to do that.

FEMALE CHARACTERS.

A FEW general remarks on Shakspeare's female characters will finish this lecture, and also this part of the course. In nothing, perhaps, does he so deeply and divinely touch the heart of humanity, as in the representation of woman. Next to the Bible, Shakspeare is the best friend and benefactor of womankind that has yet appeared on our earth; for, next to the Bible, he has done most towards appreciating what woman is, and towards instructing her what she should be. His writings contain at once the reality and the apotheosis of womanhood. The incomparable depth, and delicacy,

and truthfulness, with which he has exhibited the female character, are worth more than all the lectures and essays on social morality the world has ever seen.

Many think Shakspeare's female characters inferior to his characters of men. Doubtless, in some respects, they are so; they would not be *female* characters if they were not: but then in other respects they are superior; they are inferior in the same sort as woman is inferior to man; and they are superior in the same sort as she is superior to him. The people in question probably cannot see how woman can equal man, without becoming man, or how she can differ from him without being inferior to him. In other words, equality with them involves identity, and is therefore incompatible with subordination, and runs directly into substitution; and such, in truth, is the kind of equality which has been of late so frequently and so excruciatingly inculcated upon us. On this ground, woman cannot be made equal with man, except by unsexing and unsphering her;—a thing which Shakspeare was just as far from doing as nature is. To say, then, that Shakspeare's women, according to this view of the matter, are inferior to his men, is merely to say they are women, as they ought to be, and not men, as he meant they should not be, and as we have reason to rejoice they are not. The truth is, Shakspeare knew very well (and it is a pity some people do not learn the same thing from him or some other source) that equality and diversity do by no means necessarily exclude one another; and that, consequently, the sexes can stand or sit on the same level without standing in each other's shoes, or sitting in each other's seats. If, indeed, he had not known this,

he could not have given us characters of either sex, but only wretched and disgusting medlies and caricatures of both, such as some people, it is thought, are in danger of becoming.

How nicely, on the one hand, Shakspeare has discriminated between things really different, so as to embody, in all cases, the soul of womanhood without a particle of effeminacy ; and how perfectly, on the other hand, he has reconciled the most seemingly incompatible things, pouring into the female character all the intellectual energy and dignity of the other sex, without expelling or obscuring, in the least degree, the essence of womanhood ; and endowing the character of man with all the gentleness and tenderness of woman, without injuring or abating a jot of its essential manliness :—these things, as they are among the hardest tasks of genius, so they are among the highest perfections of his works. How to modify the same quality by the differences of sex, instead of identifying the sexes by the same quality ; and how to make it appear the same quality all the while it is borrowing a difference from the character in which it appears ; this, truly, is a thing which a little less than Shakspeare's genius could not perform at all, but which it seems to have required nothing more than his genius to perform in the utmost perfection.

For example, few characters in Shakspeare are more truly or more deeply intelligent than Portia, in *Merchant of Venice*. In her judge-like gravity and dignity of deportment ; in the extent and accuracy of her legal knowledge ; in the depth and appropriateness of her moral reflections ; in the luminous order, the logical coherence, and the eloquent transparency of her thoughts,

she almost rivals Chief Justice Marshall himself. We do not wonder that the most reverend and learned council in Christendom, bow before her decisions as the wisest judge and profoundest lawyer of the age. And yet to us who are in the secret of her sex, all the proprieties, the indefinable, inward harmonies of the character, are perfectly preserved; and the pure, sweet divineness of womanhood seems all the while to irradiate and consecrate the dress in which she is disguised.

Shakspeare had occasion in several other instances, in Julia, Viola, Rosalind, and Imogen, to exhibit females in the most delicate and trying situations in which they could possibly be placed; namely, in assuming the habit and personating the character of the other sex. How to do this so that they should maintain in the highest integrity all the essential proprieties of their sex, to us who know it, without awakening the least suspicion of it in those from whom they wish to conceal it, is a problem that may well seem almost impossible to be solved; yet Shakspeare has so done it in all cases, that we can hardly see how the appropriate graces of their characters, even as females, could be developed in any other way. It is the inward charm of female honour and modesty triumphing over outward difficulties and rising above them, instead of sacrificing or surrendering itself to them; as true greatness enhances itself and becomes the more conspicuous by surmounting the obstacles that try to impede it. The characters everywhere exemplify the innate dignity of womanhood shining out the more clearly for the disguise in which they are forced to hide it; the irresistible grace of what Spenser calls *feminitee*, transforming the very impurities it meets with

into beauty and sweetness, as fire turns pitch into light. With such matchless decorum and delicacy is the whole conducted, that the characters, or rather persons, descend without the least degradation; and, while moving our sympathies most deeply, they in nowise lose our respect; nay, the sacredness of female honour and innocence seems but the more awful and inviolable for the unnatural straits into which they are driven.

Some of the poet's female characters even violate still further the outward proprieties of their sex, and to the still further heightening, if possible, of its inward harmonies. They appear as wooers, following and serving in disguise the objects of their affections. Here, in the words of Lamb, "the ordinary rules of courtship are reversed, the habitual feelings crossed. Yet with such exquisite address is the dangerous subject handled, that their forwardness loses them no honour; delicacy dispenses with its laws in their favour; and nature, in their cases alone, seems delighted to suffer a sweet violation." "Such wonders," says this flower of critics, "true poetry and passion can do, to bestow grace and dignity on subjects which naturally seem insusceptible of them." In all this it seems as if the sweetly constituted mind of Shakspeare could not endure to harbour an ugly thought or impure meditation, and in its instinctive pious awe of womanhood turned all that it touched into images of virtue and loveliness.

Beaumont and Fletcher are the only dramatists within my knowledge, who, in attempts of this sort, have at all approached Shakspeare, and they could not have done it, had he not first shown them how; for even their partial success is plainly due to his example. It is ob-

vious, indeed, that they, together with Ford and Massinger, tried generally to rival Shakspeare in the representation of woman. They might as well have attempted to put the sun and moon in their pockets! The transparent beauty of their female characters often strikes us, indeed, with cold admiration. In their unnatural faultlessness, however, they seem, for most part, little but modified repetitions of each other. And they fail to engage our sympathies, because we cannot help feeling that their angelic transparency results from their having no human blood in them. Even in beauty and sweetness of character, they are several grades below Shakspeare's women; yet they have not a hundredth part the warm, breathing, flesh-and-blood reality of his. The truth is, these authors could not mould the pure breath of heaven and the clay of humanity into the same being, so that the two should "cohere semblably together." They could produce the beautiful; they could produce the true; could even keep up a sort of innocent, agreeable flirtation between truth and beauty, but they could not marry and mould them together; could not exhibit them "in mutual love and honour joined." In a word, they had not the genius to embody the ideal in the real. Of course, therefore, their best conceptions have little power to raise us; for to do this, the ideal must lay hold of us through the real. They often soar, indeed, to a considerable height; but, in their comparative littleness, they become invisible to our mortal sight almost as soon as they get above us. The moment they consent to abide with us on the firm earth, and work with the genuine flesh and blood of humanity, the inherent impurity

of their genius breaks out in spite of all they can do, even with the help of Shakspeare's instructions.

This is strikingly evinced by Beaumont and Fletcher in one instance, where they have manifestly undertaken to imitate Shakspeare in one of his divinest creations. The Jailor's Daughter in the Two Noble Kinsmen, is undeniably an attempted imitation of Ophelia. So evident, indeed, is the imitation, that some have supposed Shakspeare himself must have had a hand in it; a supposition amply refuted by the very fact of its being an imitation; for Shakspeare was never known to attempt an imitation or repetition of himself; and seems, indeed, to have been as incapable of doing so as nature herself is, or as others are of *not* doing it. The Jailor's Daughter, however, is, in some respects, a truly wonderful creation, and certainly evinces a portion of Shakspeare's power; but of his purity not a jot. As in the case of Ophelia, overwhelming calamities, uniting with the anguish of disappointed love, drive the Jailor's Daughter into insanity, and into that dreadfulest and awfulest, but nameless infirmity of the female character when bereft of reason. Upon this circumstance the authors dwell with apparent delight, and seem to revel in exposing and exaggerating the sacred weakness and wretchedness of the victim. When sinking under this most pitiable and heart-rending calamity,—a calamity which nature almost instinctively shrinks from contemplating,—and when the poor creature seems deserted by heaven and earth, or rather, as if her soul had been taken back to heaven while the life yet remained in the body, their innate impurity seems to exult in its shameless and im-

pious sacrilege on this soul-forsaken husk of womanhood.

How differently did Shakspeare handle this awful subject ! With inexpressible delicacy of soul, and like some protecting spirit of humanity, sent to guard its sacredest possession from unholy eyes and irreverent hands, he barely hints the awful infirmity, just enough to move our deepest and tenderest sympathies ; and then draws the veil of silence over it, as if an angel had that instant whispered to him, that such sorrows were too sacred for human eyes, or even human thoughts, and should be left to Him who alone can sufficiently pity and effectually relieve them. The truth is, Beaumont and Fletcher, though worthy, perhaps, as Lamb says, to be called a sort of inferior Shakspeares, were, however, fallen Shakspeares. Whatever of his genius abode in them, had been shorn of its moral beams ; and if, with some vestiges of its original brightness, it seemed not less, it certainly seemed not more than an archangel ruined. Indeed, for innate, unconscious purity of soul, we need not look for Shakspeare's parallel in literature. In this respect, as in respect of genius itself, he is like the sun in the heavens, alone and unapproachable.

Coleridge says, the excellence of Shakspeare's women consists in their want of character ; and that Pope's expression, "most women have no character at all," though intended for satire, really conveys the highest compliment that could be given them. Against this remark, understood as Coleridge meant, there is certainly no objection, but it may be a question whether the language does not rather cover up the idea than express it. The meaning doubtless is that Shakspeare's

women are characterless morally in the same sense and for the same reason as Shakspeare himself is characterless intellectually. His women are as thoroughly and intensely individual as any of his characters; but they have no one element or quality more than another; so that all characteristic peculiarities are excluded by their very harmony and completeness of character. So exquisite is the proportion, and so perfect the accordance of all their feelings and thoughts with one another, that there can be no preponderance among them, no outjuttings or protuberances, to mark, that is, to characterize the combination. In short, it is their perfect evenness and entireness of being in all their movements and impressions that makes them characterless. There is the same reciprocity, the same unresisting, spontaneous concurrence, among all their feelings, as among all of Shakspeare faculties. In whatever direction a single impulse starts, thither all the other impulses immediately flock, and join themselves into perfect integrity of movement. Whether the first moving principle be passion, as in Juliet, or affection, as in Cordelia, or religion, as in Isabella, or ambition, as in Lady Macbeth, there is always the same unanimity and confluence of all their feelings. Nay, when the direction has once been taken, it is scarcely possible to distinguish which is the leading impulse; for "each seems pressing foremost in the throng." We cannot tell whether Lady Macbeth, for example, desires the crown more for herself or for her husband; that is, whether she be actuated more by ambition or affection. In her, as in others, all impulses seem bound together into one life, one motion, and one

purpose, as if they knew no law but mutuality, and sought no object but harmony with each other.

It is for this reason that woman, in Shakspeare as in nature, surrenders herself up so entirely to whatever object her heart has once fixed itself. In the mind of a true woman there is no division or distraction of aims; no conflicting of impulses; no pulling of different feelings in opposite directions; she "moveth altogether, if she move at all." When such a being receives an object into her heart, she locks it there and throws away the key. Accordingly in Shakspeare's female characters, when "the rich golden shaft" finds its way into their bosoms, it seems to "kill the flock of all affections else that live in them;" when love enters, it absorbs all the other passions into itself, so that the stronger they are the more they strengthen this. In movements of this sort, therefore, they know no reserve and ask no retreat; they give all, or nothing; and when they give, their whole life and being, with all its hopes and all its havings, is bound up in the gift. Hence the well-known constancy, and devotion, and fortitude of nature's and Shakspeare's women; qualities which form the crowning excellence of the female character, and in which woman so far and so unfortunately surpasses the other sex.)

After these remarks, I probably need not say, that Shakspeare's women are actuated by sentiment and principle much more than by fashion, and expediency, and public opinion. Nature is both law and impulse to them. They are always found listening to the dictates of an inward sense, whose voice to them outweighs the world. Of course, therefore, they always have a hand

in making their own matches ; and as they are not impelled to choose, so they are not to be restrained from their choice, by any prudential considerations whatever. In this respect Imogen is a fair specimen of them ; and for her the law of nature could not be repealed or suspended by any earthly power, nor could the violation of her faith, her duty, and her honour as a woman, be compensated to her by any earthly rewards. With intelligence enough generally, to supply a whole community of fashionably-educated ladies, Shakspeare's women do not pretend to be governed by the maxims of worldly prudence, nor by the unimpassioned dictates of the understanding. They never undertake, therefore, to exemplify the supremacy or the sufficiency of human reason ; never set themselves up as philosophers or logicians ; never try to rival, to imitate, to *be* the other sex. Perhaps nothing is more characteristic of them, than that they are not so rational as to avoid falling in love ; nor do they pretend to have any other reason for loving than a woman's reason. They are, indeed, no miracles of discretion ; veterans from the cradle in the knowledge of the world ; old in their youth, and young in their age : with the prudence of forty at eighteen, and the impulsiveness of eighteen at forty. In short, (for the thing may as well be spoken,) they are neither fashionable, nor philosophic, but romantic women ; and that too in the best and truest sense of the term ; for it is the romance of noble sentiment and lofty purpose, not of mere vanity and sentimentality. The vitalities of nature are not stifled in them beneath a load of conventionalities ; they are governed by affection and conscience, not by the force of custom and public opinion.

They plainly were not educated under our modern forcing and freezing system, which suppresses the passions instead of subduing them to higher faculties; which makes them go right by taking from them the power to go wrong; which leaves them to be kept erect by the pressure of outward appliances, not by the inward strength of virtuous principle; and which secures them against the perils of life by crushing every impulse out of them but vanity and selfishness. They are therefore no mere drawing-room ladies, living altogether in the beau-ideal, whose chief business it is to control their feelings and show off their accomplishments; who are as correct, and nearly as heartless as waxen images with glass eyes; in whom the chaste enamel of nature, and all the free blushes of native grace, have been polished off with the brush of artificial manners; who, in their sleepless self-omniscience, force out conscience and affection by forcing in fashion and prudence; and who seem equally incapable of forgetting themselves and of remembering their duties. Every thing about them is direct, entire, and ingenuous; they are always seeking the happiness of others, not their applause; their actions are inspired by a genuine, self-forgetting love of the beautiful, not by the love of being thought beautiful; and the graces of their minds and persons always come from them involuntarily and unconsciously, like the expiration of their breath. They therefore never seek society for the same reason that they resort to the looking-glass; never put off suitors for the sake of being wooed the harder; are as apt to be overpowered by their own feelings, as to overpower the feelings of others; as ready to be the subjects of affection as the objects of it; and

take no pride or pleasure in making conquests where they do not mean to be conquered, but rather, with the instinct of true modesty and delicacy, shrink from inspiring a passion which they cannot reciprocate, or where they cannot reciprocate it. Secure in their inward truth and innocence, they never try to cover up their own uncouth thoughts with affected frowns at the uncouth words or conduct of others. In their perfect simplicity and freedom from outward pretension, they seem to do nothing but what they feel, and to feel nothing but what they do. Strong in themselves, and in the union of reason with right feeling, their virtue is an attribute of themselves, not an accident of their situation; does not spring from circumstances, and is therefore independent of them. Chance and vanity have no hand in leading them right, and consequently have no power to lead them wrong. Unfortunate and unhappy they may be; untrue and unworthy they cannot be. They are not belles at all. They are not like the heroines of common tragedy. They always have other and higher ends in view, than to win admiration, or figure in poems and histories. If heroines, therefore, at all, they are so without knowing it, or wishing it to be known. Always feeling, and thinking, and speaking as women, moved by the real interests of life, not as authors or actors, moved by playhouse vanities, their heroism springs up of its own free will and accord, and because they cannot help it; and their good actions seem done not to be seen, but in the belief that they are not seen; and therefore we feel assured that they are equally good when out of sight.

LECTURE VI.

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR—COMEDY OF ERRORS—TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA—LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST—TAMING OF THE SHREW—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

HITHERTO I have been chiefly occupied with the general subject of Shakspeare himself, his works, and his critics: henceforth I am to speak of his dramas somewhat in detail, giving particular analyses of his leading characters, and, as far as may be, re-producing and representing to the intellect what he has set forth to the feelings and imagination. This is by far the most difficult and most important part of my task. In prosecuting it, however, I shall rarely have occasion to speak without the authority of far abler and wiser men than myself; and whenever I shall venture to differ from them, I trust I shall be able to give such reasons as will excuse my dissent, though they should fail to establish my point. Perhaps I need not say, that, regarding criticism as merely the interpreter, not the lawgiver of art, I shall nowhere attempt to instruct Shakspeare, but shall confine myself to the task of showing what he *has* done, leaving to other and wiser men the office of showing what he *ought* to have done. Nevertheless, it must not be supposed, that, because I do not presume to censure any thing, I am therefore bold to approve every thing, in his works. The truth is, there are many things in

them that are not to my taste, and so there are in nature herself; but, surely, this is quite as apt to be my fault as theirs; and I have found too many proofs of his superiority, not only to me but to all the rest of his critics, to venture my judgment against his. The encouraging of others to get more knowledge of his works, or the helping of them to bring forth into a more distinct and available form the knowledge they have already got,—this, and this only, will be my endeavour, as it is assuredly my aim.

I have remarked several times already, that a drama, or any other work of art, is to be viewed as a vital, organic whole; every part being, in fact, vitally related to every other part, and therefore not to be rightly understood or explained apart from those relations. In other words, it is from their connection with the whole that the parts derive their life and significance. As this organic unity and integrity is the highest possible merit of a work of art, considered merely as such, so Shakspeare is the first of all artists except nature, his works being, in the main, so true, so living, so actual, that it is impossible to speak correctly of them without speaking of ourselves, what we all think, feel, and are. Hence the utility, hence also the difficulty of having his works truly and justly interpreted; such interpretation being nothing else than a practical commentary on human nature, and helping us to know ourselves, both as we are and as we ought to be. But the difficulty of right interpretations is commensurate with, and inseparable from the utility thereof; for to see things by themselves is one thing; to see them in all their relations, their reciprocal actings and interworkings, is another, and much

harder thing, and requires a calmness and comprehension of mind very rarely possessed. Hence it is that Shakspeare has suffered so much from his critics, having almost realized the fable of Acteon's being devoured by his own dogs. For it is with his characters as with those in real life; with his dramatic communities as with the actual communities of the world: we may take a very adequate impression of them as a whole; we may know them well enough concretely, and as they live and move before us, without being at all able to extricate the elements of our knowledge, to draw them out into logical forms, and intelligible proportions. In a word, there is the same difficulty in analyzing and explaining his characters, as in analyzing and explaining those about us; we seem to know them until we attempt to explain them, when we find ourselves at a stand, because our knowledge, though real and true, has not been digested and arranged into an available and communicable shape. If Shakspeare's men and women were, what most authors give us, mere crystallized virtues and personified abstractions, such would not be the case; but to his honour and our advantage they are as far as possible from being any such things.

It is said that Shakspeare smiled at the attempts of his contemporaries to classify his plays. And, indeed, to classify them by any mutually-exclusive lines, were quite impossible. For he seldom cuts out any single dramatic element from its connection in actual life, and exhibits it by itself. With a few exceptions, his comedies occasionally border on the interest of tragedy, and his tragedies on the entertainment of comedy; each play containing within itself many elements and aspects

of human life ; the most various and even opposite feelings and characters being everywhere brought together, and blending into the more consistent, harmonious impression, for the very reason that each is in turn a relief from, and a preparation for, the other. Properly speaking, therefore, each play, being a representation of life, and not of any single passion or principle, forms a class by itself ; Shakspeare and nature having no constant, standing models. His plays, however, are usually classed under the three heads of comedies, tragedies, and histories, which classification is the one I shall follow, as I regard the terms of the arrangement of very little moment, so that we can get at the thing in an orderly and intelligible manner.

This and the three following lectures will be taken up with what are usually termed the comedies, though in some of them the serious parts decidedly preponderate. Perhaps I should remark, by the way, that Shakspeare's comedies alone give but a very inadequate idea of his comic powers ; many of his most exquisite comic scenes being interspersed in his more serious pieces. Hazlitt says, "he had equal genius for comedy and tragedy ; and his tragedies are better than his comedies only because tragedy is better than comedy ;"—a position hardly borne out by his comedies alone. His faculties, indeed, appear, generally, to have worked to greater individual perfection, when he allowed them all to work together ; and to tie himself down throughout a whole play to any one element or aspect of life, seems, for most part, to have cramped rather than concentrated his powers.

Mery Wives of Windsor, besides having the general

air and movement of pure comedy, involves throughout that species of intrigue, which is usually considered the appropriate groundwork of comic representation. And by intrigue I mean that complication of cross-purposes and conflicting aims, whereby different persons of the drama endeavour to circumvent and overreach each other. The chief merit of such a plot, so far as I know, is, that it produce a certain agreeable perplexity and surprise, without confusion ; the awkward and grotesque predicaments into which the persons bring each other by their cross-plottings and counter-plottings, forming, in a great part, the life of the representation. In reference to all of which points, this play will probably suffer in comparison only with others from the same pen. Tried by other and more important considerations, the play has a much higher value. In this, as in all of Shakspeare's plays, with but one exception, the plot and all that belongs to it, was obviously invented for the characters, not the characters for the plot ; the one being, in fact, but as the canvas whereon the others are drawn. Accordingly, the play, with all its grotesque comicalities, is full of character in the best sense of the term ; and is distinguished from and above most of its kind, in that they hardly aspire to any thing more than an exhibition of manners, which seem to have been generally regarded as the only proper material of comedy. Shakspeare, indeed, seems to have lacked the power, or rather the weakness, to separate manners from character, so as to exhibit the former by themselves, thus making mere shows instead of plays.

FALSTAFF.

OF course the hero of the play, is that delightful and detestable, side-shaking old sinner, Sir John Falstaff. In this place, however, his knightship is conspicuous, not so much for what he practises as for what is practised upon him ; he being, in fact, but the dupe and victim of his own heroism, and provoking laughter by what he suffers, not by what he does. Of course every-body knows the tradition that the play was written at the request of Queen Elizabeth, who, delighted with the fat, funny old knight as a warrior, desired to know him in the capacity of a lover. Of love, however, in any right or respectable sense, this "reverend vice and gray iniquity" was essentially incapable. Love with him could obviously be but another form of sensuality, and to have exhibited him otherwise had been to contradict, not carry out his character. The poet, therefore, was in propriety and decency obliged to make him unsuccessful. Accordingly he is here seen labouring under a palpable eclipse ; not so much ludicrous as ridiculous. He is plainly out of his element, and ought not to have been represented in love ; at least not in circumstances where it was necessary he should fail ; it takes off from our opinion of his adroitness, his circumspection of times and occasions. His repeated failures dishearten him, and throw a damper on his wit ; his brain begins to abate its quickness and sprightliness when he can no longer, either in fruition or anticipation, snuff up the fumes of sensual pleasure. The sun of his prosperity was doomed to set when he entered the dominions of Cupid ; and his hitherto perennial and inexhaustible jets of humour are frozen up

by the pale beams of Diana. The ridiculousness of his situation is too much even for his incomparable genius ; he ceases to turn his defeats into triumphs by his fulness, aptness, and alertness of resource. The forestaste and prospect, indeed, of a grasp at Master Brooks' money, operates for a while as wine upon his faculties, making them "apprehensive, quick, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes ;" while at the same time Ford's jealousy furnishes him an apt theme to let them loose upon ; but all this is to little purpose : he is borne down by the resistless tide of ill fortune, to the great disappointment of our risibilities, and the sad curtailment of his glory ; and it is not till the very last, when it can no longer serve his turn, that his wonted fertility of evasions and expedients comes to his aid and relief. On the whole one can hardly help thinking, that after having furnished the world so much sport, being "not only witty in himself, but the cause that wit is in other men," he should have been left alone, to repent and die. We cannot choose but pity even while we approve the merited, yet hardly-merited failures of one who, driving away "the foolish, and dull, and crudy vapours which environed" our brains, has so often convulsed us into health : the exhilaration he has afforded us having invested him with a sort of facetious reverence, so that it does violence to our feelings to see him thus drawn forth for exposure, not for exhibition. Though the two Merry Wives are not so bad as to make us wish him success in his enterprise, neither are they so good as to make us wish that their reputation should thrive by his decay. For a further and full account of this strange, uncouth, disgusting, captivating compound of grossness and subt-

lety ; so expert, apt, available, inexhaustible in resources ; so ponderous in body, so agile in spirit ; so empty of virtue, so full of juice ; so hardened in conscience, so mellow in understanding ; so imperturbable and irresistible in impudence ; so open to attack, so impossible to corner ; always failing, yet always thriving by his failures, because they only minister incentives and occasions to his wit ; converting indignities into opportunities, and adversities into advantages, and so succeeding most when most defeated ;—all this must be reserved until I encounter him in the meridian of his glory, drinking, stealing, lying, recruiting, warring, and discoursing of wit, wine, valour, and humour, with prince Hal at his side to uncork him and draw him out.

MISTRESS QUICKLY.

OF Sir Jack's followers, also, I must leave to speak, till I can meet them elsewhere ; barely remarking here, that they obviously sympathize with their master, both in faculty and in fortune. All of them are under a cloud : the light of Bardolph's nose is extinguished ; Pistol, ancient Pistol's tongue struts with a much less potent impotence ; in a word, the whole troop is sadly shorn of its beams. Not altogether so, however, with Dame Quickly, who here appears in the interesting character of a match-maker and go-between. Her equal encouragement, and perfect impartiality, to all of Anne Page's suitors, both in what she does for them, and in what she receives from them, admirably illustrates the indefatigable benevolence of that class of worthies to-

wards themselves, and is so descriptive of a certain perpetual sort of people, as almost to make one believe in the transmigration of souls. In her case, however, this species of gossiping and going-between, with all the mendacity inseparable from it, has ceased to be censurable; "'tis her vocation;" and, as is generally the case with such people, the character appears too ridiculous to be criminal. But the real genius of the play is Master Abraham Slender, cousin to Robert Shallow, esquire, and undoubtedly the most potent piece of imbecility Shakespeare has anywhere delineated. In his self-important simpleness, his hereditary squireship pretension, and his aristocratic, lack-brain originality, he is altogether inimitable;—one of those indescribable and irresistible nihilities, in whom, as in other vegetables, nature is all in all; who are obliged to be *sui-generis*, forasmuch as they lack force of character to imitate or resemble anybody else; and who, once seen, never can be forgotten. But the valiant Welsh parson, Sir Hugh Evans, that ripe scholar, and accomplished divine; learned in words, and ignorant of things; innocent, officious, pragmatical, vain; with a bee in his ear and a proverb in his mouth; ready indifferently to wield the sword or the word; to hack limbs or to hack English; to keep the peace or to break it;—what shall be said of him? Truly, I can say nothing but that he belongs to that class of men, not wholly extinct even yet, who, without sense enough to doubt their sufficiency, mistaking their laziness for love of God, their aversion to work for a vocation to preach, and having sometimes dreamed of clerical honours and emoluments, wake up in the honest belief that they have had a di-

vine call, and proceed, forthwith, to prepare for their mission.

Such are some of the characters in this singular play; all of them perfectly original, yet wonderfully lifelike, and hugely amusing. It is doubtful whether there be more of truth, or more of humour in the representation; yet every thing is kindly and genial about it, so that we cannot help loving the poor fools, after a sort, even while, and perhaps because, we laugh at them.

PAGE, FORD, AND THEIR WIVES.

PAGE, Ford, and their Wives are barely a respectable, commonplace sort of people, who are too prudent, too much interested in themselves, to do any thing very bad or very good. The women do not appear to regard Falstaff's proposals as any great piece of effrontery to them; and we are pretty much inclined to agree with them. Indeed, we are apt to suspect they were not altogether unwilling to receive the love, though of course too prudent to accept the lover. Whatever of romance the play contains is in Miss Anne Page, and her lover Fenton; and that is not enough to interest us, though they have nothing else, save as it is the means of plaguing the girl's parents, whose shameless counter-plottings to sell their daughter, against her better will, are thereby defeated in the very midst of their successful tricks upon Falstaff; so that, out of their mutual disappointment and vexation, we take a sort of revenge for their triumph over our old favourite. Ford, jealous, and wishing to verify his suspicions, and so meanly intriguing and la-

bouring, first to tempt, then to detect his wife, in disguise encouraging and facilitating the knight's overtures to her, and then coming in to surprise her, aptly illustrates the nature and workings of the passion which at once devours and disgraces him. As credulous as he is jealous, and therefore disposed to believe and magnify every thing that makes for his fears, his opinion of Falstaff as "a gentleman of excellent breeding, admirable discourse, of great admittance, authentic in his place and person, generally allowed for his many warlike, courtlike, and learned preparations," besides being most exquisitely ludicrous, is a fit punishment upon him for his mean and miserable dotage.

COMEDY OF ERRORS.

COMEDY of ERRORS is the only play of Shakspeare's which can be justly said to have no characters; the persons, or rather, the dramatis personæ, existing merely or mainly for the sake of the plot; and what should be characters, being little else than mere personifications of resemblances. It is as if the genius of confusion had gotten up a dramatic device to string its whimsical perplexities on. Two brothers, twins, of the same name, and impossible to be distinguished, have been irrecoverably lost to each other from their earliest infancy. To these are joined two other brothers, likewise twins, of the same name, and as indistinguishable as the former. One of the brothers, with his servant, is represented as roving about from place to place, in quest of the other brother, until the former lands at Ephesus, where, of course unknown to him, the latter is residing in pros-

perity and honour. Immediately both pairs of brothers are everywhere taken for each other : even the masters know not their respective servants, nor the servants their respective masters. The stranger, to his utter astonishment, is everywhere saluted by the titles and called to the duties of the resident brother ; even the wife of the latter mistakes the former for her husband. Impatient of her husband's unexpected detention from home, she starts off in quest of him, falls in with the stranger, forces him, in spite of his earnest protestations that he knows her not, to accompany her home to dinner, and, meanwhile, very innocently bars the doors against her husband, who thereupon flies off into some very humorous schemes of revenge against his wife. The stranger, however, immediately falls in love with his entertainer's sister, and courts her, who, in return, chides his supposed infidelity, and remands him to the claims of his supposed wife. In all this, truly, there is room for confusion and perplexity enough ; and it is doubtful whether the events be more distressing to the persons, or more diverting to the spectators. To such a pitch do the perplexities finally proceed, that both of the brothers and their servants are almost driven distracted, and are thought by others to be mad sure enough ; until the attempt to confine them and treat them as lunatics, brings them all together, when the confusion is of course cleared up. Meanwhile, the humour of the two servants pours down an incessant shower of puns and witticisms ; even the floggings which they get through mistake for their own unavoidable mistakes, serving only to put their wits into a gallop. The tender distresses of the wife at the seeming alienation of her lord's affections, the virtu-

ous remonstrances of the sister, and the passionate wooings of the stranger, are in a style not altogether unworthy of Shakspeare. But the most Shakspearian scene in the play, is where the Abbess, who turns out to be the mother of the two brothers, draws from the distressed wife the history and causes of her husband's supposed estrangement and lunacy. On the whole, it is not easy to decide whether the poet hath conferred the greater favour upon us by writing this play, or by writing no more like it. He seems, indeed, to have made the most of his subject; yet "the thread of the conceit is spun out finer than the staple of the argument." The characterlessness of the persons is all of a piece with the improbability, or rather, impossibility of the plot. The whole play is like a masquerade of riddles; the blankness of the figures consorting perfectly with the fancifulness of the setting. As much alike in essence as in looks and names, both pairs of brothers are mere repetitions of each other, without individuality, and therefore without reality; so that we can distinguish them, as they can distinguish each other, only by the confusion that arises the moment they begin to speak. In a word, the whole thing is in nowise a play, but only a mere puzzle. It is generally understood to be in imitation of a comedy of Plautus, is supposed to be all Shakspeare's, and was written in his youth. It is probably the only work wherein the poet attempted to imitate, and it need hardly be said that in this instance he went just about as far from nature as he did towards his model.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

Two Gentlemen of Verona is also reckoned among the poet's earliest efforts. It is merely a dramatic trifle, having nothing unnatural and not much of nature in it. Though the play is not entirely devoid of character, the characters are barely sketched with the utmost lightness and looseness, hardly substantial enough for our grasp, and rather shadows cast into our view from objects out of sight, than the objects themselves. The work, however, is touched off with an easy, unpremeditated grace, which marks it for Shakspeare's, as if he had rather dreamed it than written it, and has now and then a stray smile of his genius, any one of which is enough to light up a spot much darker than this. The following, even if there were no other, would sufficiently bear me out in this remark. It is from the heroine, in reply to the remonstrances of her waitingwoman against an intended pilgrimage in quest of her lover:

“The current, that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou knowest, being stopped, impatiently doth rage;
But, when his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with the enamelled stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage;
And so by many winding nooks he strays,
With willing sport, to the wild ocean.
Then let me go, and hinder not my course;
I'll be as patient as a gentle stream,
And make a pastime of each weary step,
Till the last step have brought me to my love;
And there I'll rest, as, after much turmoil,
A blessed soul doth in Elysium.”

The play illustrates the truant fickleness of human passion, and the weakness of human reason when opposed to passion ; and at the same time paints the loveliness and final success of maiden constancy. Julia, seeking out and attending her faithless lover in the disguise of a page, and even making herself the servant to his infidelity, is one of those exhibitions of female purity, and sweetness, and devotion, in which Shakspeare so vastly excels all other writers. Though in her fearful situation,

“ The air hath starved the roses in her cheeks,
And pinched the lily tincture of her face,”

she hath parted with none of her maiden delicacy and modesty. Her innocence and gentleness of disposition, are but the more apparent for the chill, rough atmosphere which seems to threaten them ; and if she provokes us at all, it is by the too ready forgiveness of her penitent abuser. Perhaps it is a sufficient excuse for her hazardous undertaking, that she believes her lover to be all truth, and never dreams but that his heart is as far from fraud as her own, until she finds him with the proofs of his infidelity on his tongue. The poet seems to have delighted in multiplying the difficulties of female constancy, that he might the better test its strength and display its beauty. After all, however, Julia is but a dim and distant foreshadowing of Imogen. Proteus, truant in love, and therefore false to friendship, moves little feeling in us of any sort ; his errors obviously springing from youthful impulse, undisciplined and unregulated by experience. Though passion sedu-

ces him from truth and reason, the failure of his undertaking, and Julia's heroic constancy, recover him to them ; love, overmastered in the absence of its object, resumes its sway in her presence ; and he learns something of his own weakness, without losing any thing of his virtue.—Launce, servant to the errant lover, and master of quibbles and clenches, with his warm heart and wagging tongue, sobbing in parables and conceits, is a genuine sprout of the poet's brain. The scene between him and his dog, where he recounts the sins of the latter which he has taken upon himself, to save the poor brute from being cudgelled and killed, is one of those odd, touching, nonsensical things which are to be found nowhere but in Shakspeare and nature. To conclude ;—as the smiles of infants are said to be the first fruits of human reason ; so I should be tempted to call this play the infant smile of Shakspeare's genius ; and even as such it is precious, for it proves, what many seem to have doubted, that his genius had an infancy ; that it was not born full-grown, ripe, and ready for service, but had to creep, totter and prattle ;—much observation, study, practice, experience, being required to develope it into manhood and maturity. What a difference between this play and *Lear* ! Yet they both sprung from the same marvellous source.

LOVE'S LABOUR 'S LOST.

NEXT to *Comedy of Errors* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost* is to me the least interesting of Shakspeare's plays. But perhaps this is be-

cause, as Schlegel says, "a whole cornucopia of the most vivacious jokes is poured into it;" for, as we are told by one of the characters in this play, "a jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it, never in the tongue of him that makes it." The play, however, has some characters which I should be loth to part with; and these could not be well developed without all the rest.

A young king of Navarre, having been continually diverted from the graver pursuits of royalty by the presence and power of female attractions, abjures the society of ladies, and banishes them the court for the space of three years, that he may devote himself uninterruptedly during that time to the study of wisdom. Several of his noble companions are joined with him in the oath of seclusion and study. But no sooner are they fairly started in their new mode of life, than the princess of France, with her retinue, appears at his court in an official capacity. Obligated, of course, to give her audience, the king immediately falls in love with her. Three of his companions likewise fall in love with three ladies in her train. Each being secretly resolved to break his oath, yet fearing the consequences, their perplexity is, how to compass their resolutions without having it known. In their several manouverings for this purpose consists the intrigue of the play. Matters proceed very auspiciously for them, until in their solitary plottings they overheard each other. Having thus unwittingly betrayed themselves, each being aware of the others' designs, yet supposing the others ignorant of his own, they fall to mutual rallying, when each, to his utter confusion, finds himself caught in his own snare. Sensible of their awkward and ridiculous situation, they

agree to prosecute their suits to the ladies in disguise, who, knowing their former oath, and being secretly apprized of their present design, disguise themselves also, and so, to their still greater confusion, turn the tables upon them. Having now an opportunity, which they are far enough from neglecting, of revenging the affront offered to their sex in abjuring their society, the ladies deny to hear their suits for a whole year, and at the same time impose severe penances upon them for their folly. The visitation is particularly hard on Biron, the real hero of the play, and described as one,

“ Whose eye begets occasion for his wit ;
 For every object that the one doth catch,
 The other turns to a mirth moving jest ;
 Which his fair tongue (conceit’s expositor),
 Delivers in such apt and gracious words,
 That aged ears play truant at his tales,
 And younger heavings are quite ravished :
 So sweet and voluble is his discourse.”

Unfortunately, however, in his constant overflowing of satirical mirth, my Lord Biron has become notorious for making the most harassing reprisals on the possessions of Cupid ;

“ And the world’s large tongue
 Proclaims him for a man replete with mocks ;
 Full of comparisons and wounding flouts ;
 Which he on all estates will execute,
 That lie within the mercy of his wit.”

As a natural and just consequence, he has acquired a most unenviable distinction among the ladies : but the

noble eulogy which he afterwards pronounces on love, and them, and their society, when called upon to prove

“ Their loving lawful, and their faith not torn,”

makes ample amends for his former levity. For wit, wisdom, and poetry, all combined in one, it seems impossible to be surpassed. I can give but a part of it.

“ But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,
Lives not alone immured in the brain ;
But, with the motion of all elements,
Courses as swift as thought in every power ;
And gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices.
It adds a precious seeing to the eye :
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind ;
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound ;
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible,
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails ;
Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste :
For valour, is not love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides ?
Subtle as Sphinx ; as sweet and musical
As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair ;
And, when love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.
Never durst poet touch a pen to write,
Until his ink were tempered with love's sighs ;
O, then his lines would ravish savage ears,
And plant in tyrants mild humility.
From women's eyes this doctrine I derive :
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire ;
They are the books, the arts, the academes,
That show, contain, and nourish all the world ;
Else, none at all in aught proves excellent :

The fools you were these women to forswear ;
Or, keeping what is sworn, you will prove fools."

The penance, by the way, which Lady Rosaline imposes on Biron, as the condition of her favour, contains an exquisite moral ; for the innate divinity of the poet's mind breaks out even in its maddest revels :—

"You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick, and still converse
With groaning wretches ; and your task shall be,
With all the fierce endeavour of your wit,
To enforce the pained impotent to smile."

This she rightly considers

"The way to choke a gibing spirit,
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace,
Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools."

Hard as is the task

"To move wild laughter in the throat of death,"

his lordship submits, justly esteeming her, who has the wisdom and virtue to impose it, well worth the sacrifice.

On the whole, these wisdom-seeking lords are little better, we should say, than arrant witlings and aristocratic wags ; and perhaps Biron is the only one among them who has wisdom enough to catch and save him when his wit breaks down. As might be expected, no sooner do they become too wise and good to lose a part of their time with the women, than they fall straightway to killing all their time with each other. It is not without truth and significance, therefore, that they are rep-

resented as continually hunting up and studying out puns, and clenches, and conceits. Apparently by way of contrast, but really by way of illustration, several other characters are all along introduced, with notions equally whimsical, and practices equally absurd. Dull, the inexpressible constable, and Costard, the inexpressible clown: Holofernes, the schoolmaster, and Sir Nathaniel, the curate; those profound magi of criticism, those venerable eaters and digesters of vocables, with their quick smell of false Latin and quicker taste of verbal felicities; discussing over the dinner-table "the elegance, the facility, and the golden cadence of poesy;"—who "have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps;" and who "have lived long in the alms-basket of words:"—these, together with Don Adriano de Armado, the fantastical Spanish phantasm, and mighty potentate of nonsense; "his humour lofty, his discourse peremptory, his tongue filed, his eye ambitious, his gait majestical, and his general behaviour vain, ridiculous and thrasonical;"—

"A man in all the world's new fashion planted,
That hath a mint of phrases in his brain;—
One, whom the music of his own vain tongue
Doth ravish, like enchanting harmony:"

and, though last, not least, the Herculean Mr. Moth, Armado's page, that handful of wit, that "pigeon-egg of discretion," with his "mother's tongue," and his "penny of observation;" whose mouth never opens but to let in food and let out witticisms:—these characters, all distinctly, though not deeply traced, are the real bloom and fragrance of the play. Boyet, also, the lord attending

on the Princess of France, that amusing piece of animated French cloth, stuffed with court compliments ;

“ The ape of form, Monsieur the nice,
Who kissed away his hand in courtesy ;”
——“ Who pecks up wit, as pigeons peas,
And utters it again when Jove doth please ;
Who is wit’s pedler, and retails his wares
At wakes and wassels, meetings, markets, fairs ;”

this is another true Shakspearian sketch.

The latter set of characters, though seemingly the opposite of the former, are really but the more ludicrous and farcical side of the same thing. The whole play, indeed, seems to me a piece of good-natured irony on the abuse of learning, and a humorous caricature of wit ostentatious and vain of itself. In this view the proceedings of the lower characters are a capital take-off of the shallow, conceited philosophy which engages men in the study of words to the neglect of things, and prompts them to seek for wisdom by using other people’s eyes instead of their own. The learned curate’s definition of a blockhead, when trying to account for Constable Dull’s ignorance, unlocks the secret of the whole play :—“ Sir, he hath never fed on the dainties that are bred in a book ; he hath not eat paper, as it were ; he hath not drunk ink : his intellect is not replenished ; he is only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts.” The readiness with which the lower characters perpetrate all sorts of puns, and quips, and quirks, and twist language into all kinds of fantastical shapes, is a delightful commentary on the tendency of the study to which their superiors have devoted themselves, to de-

generate into mere verbal tricks, and conceits, and bookish formalities. Nearly the whole play, in short, is a sham fight of words; and the chief difference between the rabblemen and noblemen, is that the former are punsters and witlings by the grace of God, the latter by special efforts of their own.

As a work of art, perhaps the chief merit of this play are the unity and harmony of feeling that pervade it. The leading characters are all young, and every thing about them seems to sympathize with their impulses and reflect their hilarity. It is as if Apollo, or some other divinity, had "put a spirit of youth in every thing." It is by thus lending to surrounding objects the very souls and passions of his characters, that the poet so completely transports us into their whereabouts, and makes us see with their eyes. Perhaps I cannot better conclude than with Schlegel's very just and lively description of this play:—"It is," says he, "a humorsome display of youthful frolic; the uninterrupted succession of plays upon words, and sallies of every description, hardly leave the reader time to breathe; the sparks of wit fly about in such profusion that they form complete fireworks, and the dialogue resembles the hurried manner in which the passing masks at a carnival attempt to banter each other."

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

TAMING of the Shrew is vastly different from Love's Labour's Lost, and probably as much better as it is different. The prelude to this play is one of the richest, raciest,

most delectable pieces of humour extant. An idle lord, just returned from hunting, falls in with a tinker, dead drunk, and has him removed, while in a state of insensibility, to a splendid mansion, where he is surrounded with all the pomp and equipage of nobility, with a retinue of servants in livery to anticipate his wants, and a band of players ready to entertain him for the alleged purpose of restoring him to his long-lost wits. Upon his awaking, every hand is raised, every knee is bent; all is seeming deference and devotion; compassion and anxiety are written in every countenance and gesture, as if he were their suffering lord and master sure enough. The tinker, however, has too much sense to be persuaded that his past experiences are dreams and the present appearances real, until his pretended lady appears at his side, at once weeping over his late transformation, and smiling over his promised recovery. The assurance from her own lips that he is already a husband flashes conviction upon him with all the force and suddenness of inspiration. All of which is full of meaning, and is as characteristic as it is diverting. For a man like him will believe any thing, however improbable, provided the belief will help him to any gratification. The lord and the tinker are the two extremes of society; so much so, indeed, that they well-nigh meet round on the other side, as extremes are apt to do. There is just about as much gold in the one character as in the other; only in the lord it is all on the outside, in the shape of gilding; in the tinker it is all at the centre, in the shape of a kernel. And it is doubtful which be the more ludicrous or the more dignified, the ennui which drives the one to seek sport in duping a sot, or the sottishness

which makes the other dupable into the belief of his being a lord. The irony of the thing, for it is ironical withal, is, that if a man be removed from the gutter to the palace, he changes his place only, not his mind. Under his temporary hallucination, the tinker resigns his name, but not his character; is deluded out of his experiences, but not out of his appetites and aptitudes; consents to forget his neighbours, but not his ale; and his occasional remarks, during the following play, are plainly the offspring of the old man, not of the new additions. Sly, for that is the tinker's name, is evidently no very remote kin of Sancho Panza, epitomized and Anglicized: one can almost fancy one hears him giving thanks to the inventor of drink, as his elder brother did to the inventor of sleep. The entire prelude is read in ten minutes; yet it reveals the character of the whole family of Slies. They "came in with Richard conqueror," and "are no rogues," nor any thing else, indeed, but pedlers, bear-herds, tinkers, and drinkers "of pots o' the smallest ale."—A light, aerial grace, touched occasionally with the richest colours of poetry, hovers over this most expressive of trifles. If forced to give up the prelude or the play, it would be difficult for me to choose between them, much as I value the latter.

KATHARINE AND BIANCA.

THE play itself is a perfect whirlwind of the oddest, maddest freaks, whimsies, and fancies imaginable. A rich gentleman of Padua has two daughters, one apparently all shrewishness, the other apparently all loveli-

ness. Like other good parents, he of course desires to see them married; the former anyhow, the latter to a fat estate: but he wisely denies the hand of the seeming angel to any one till the seeming shrew shall have been disposed of; which sets the wits of the angelic Bianca's suitors at work to find a suitor for the shrewish Kate: Presently the very genius of whimsicality and affected self-will appears as her suitor in the person of one Petruchio, a rich gentleman of Verona, and intimate friend to one of Bianca's suitors. Meanwhile the son of another rich gentleman of Pisa visits Padua, and is brought within the circle of Bianca's attractions. She appears to him as to others; the first sight is fatal to Lucentio:

“He saw sweet beauty in her face,
Such as the daughter of Agenor had;”
——“He saw her coral lips to move,
And with her breath she did perfume the air:
Sacred and sweet was all he saw in her.”

By a simple, though skilful enough intrigue, he woos and wins her in the disguise of a tutor to her in classic lore; being obliged to employ this method, because the old man has cut off all open approaches to her until he shall have disposed of her naughty sister. This forms a sort of underplot in the play, the main interest turning on the way Petruchio woos, and weds, and tames the frightful Kate. There is little of deep or strong character in the play, save what is contained in these two interesting personages.

The seeming contrast between the sisters is strongly marked, and probably misrepresents them both to their friends. Both, it seems to me, are affected, their affec-

tation passing for sincerity. Kate puts on the show of what she has not ; Bianca puts off the show of what she has : the one purposely seems worse, the other better, than she is. Kate, too proud to be vain, will do nothing to gain friends, every thing to serve them ; Bianca, too vain to be proud, will do every thing to gain friends, nothing to serve them. Bianca is fond of admiration, and gets it ; Kate envies her what she gets, but will not stoop or bend a hair to obtain it. In a word, Kate is wilful, Bianca selfish ; the one therefore affects shrewishness before marriage, the other conceals it till after marriage. For they do not so much change their real faces after marriage as drop the masks that have hitherto concealed them. Thus the sisters represent two classes of actual persons, though Kate represents the class by far the most rare. I have known men who were studiously mild, gentle, and amiable in appearance, yet as mean and selfish at heart as a cur ; nay, who appeared gentle and amiable even because of their meanness and selfishness : again I have known men who rather studied to appear rough, rude, reckless, and unkind, from mere disinterestness, because they were more concerned for the good of others, than for their favour, and more willing to do them a kindness than to have it known. The former perhaps will caress their friends, and then desert them ; the latter abuse their friends, and then peril their lives to serve them.

Of this latter sort, I take it, is our seemingly shrewish Kate. She belongs to that class of women, who, to bring the matter right to the point, will never allow their husbands to govern them, if they can help it, nor ever respect their husbands unless they govern them ; who,

until subdued, will do their worst to plague them, but, when subdued, will do their best to please them. This seems to be an instinct with some women to try, and prove, and know their husbands, whether they be genuine pieces of manhood, or mere lumps of dotage. For a true woman wishes to be ruled and respected by her husband, not petted and doted upon. Petruchio's treatment therefore, rather reforms the conduct than the character of his spouse; rather brings out the good which she seemed to want, than removes the bad which she seemed to have. After marriage there are no traces of the shrew in her conduct whatsoever. Her sense of duty in the new relation dissipates all her artificial crotchets, and straightens her behaviour into all reasonable propriety. She does nothing that would be considered shrewish in another woman; nothing more than the best of women might do under such provocations, unless, perchance, all her wits as well as temper were bound up in the arms of honeymoon. All the materials of her closing speech are in her heart all the while, but she disdains to let them out; nay, studiously affects the contrary in order to hide them; and it is not till Petruchio forces them out, that she stands before us in her true character. Believing, however, or at least fearing, that her bad name is merited, he is determined to make sure work at all events, and he *does* make sure work. Still the tender and considerate husband is all the while lurking under his affected wilfulness, invisible perhaps to her, but visible enough to us. He is ready to let her have her will, whenever she is ready, as she ought to be, to submit her will to his; will allow her the most sensible of women as soon as she consents to lay down all pretensions to sense on the

altar of domestic peace ; and with this view he is continually making assertions, which no woman in her senses would or could admit but for the sake of such peace.

PETRUCHIO.

PETRUCHIO falsifies himself more than Kate does, because he has more to falsify. He is himself all truth, yet he utters nothing but lies. A man of the most scrupulous honour and integrity, he would apparently have us think him reckless of all law, human and divine. Full of kindness and good nature, he will put on the garb of a fiend to do the work of a benefactor ; confer the greatest favours under the pretence of mere obstinacy and self-will ; and curse a man out of his five wits to conceal from him the very good he is doing him. In a word, he will at any time say more, and do fewer bad things than any other man in Italy ; not only will not let others know that he means well towards them, but, if possible, persuade them of the contrary. Thus he declares in the outset, that he cares not whom he weds, so she be rich enough ; yet the very audacity of his avowal effectually refutes it. Knowing well what Kate is reputed to be, he nevertheless runs the risk with seeming exultation, grasps at the chance with a furious joy ; and he leaves us in doubt whether he does so, because he knows her reputation is unjust, or because he is sure he can tame her, or because he delights in throwing others into consternation by his astounding eccentricities. He then proceeds to work out what seem to others the plainest

impossibilities by the wildest and absurdest contradictions.

“Say, that she rail ; why, then I’ll tell her plain,
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale :
Say, that she frown ; I’ll say, she looks as clear
As morning roses newly washed with dew :
Say she be mute, and will not speak a word ;
Then I’ll commend her volubility,
And say, she uttereth piercing eloquence :
If she do bid me pack, I’ll give her thanks,
As though she bid me stay by her a week :
If she deny to wed, I’ll crave the day
When I shall ask the banns, and when be married.”

Proceeding after this manner, he makes her do whatever he wishes, by first assuming that she has already consented to do it. He everywhere succeeds by insisting on his statements and purposes in proportion to their absurdity and ridiculousness ; whether storming, raving, and beating the servants for doing as he bids ; whether overturning the supper-table, or tossing the bed about the room, until

“She’s starved for meat, giddy for lack of sleep,
With oaths kept waking, and with brawling fed ;”

he does it all “in reverend care of her,” and “under name of perfect love :” and poor Kate, under his manifold tender persecutions, is soon brought to feel how vain it is to correct his apparent mistakes, since all her corrections only seem to confirm him in them. She has no resource but to endorse at once his maddest assertions ; and when she does this, his end is accomplished, and he ceases to make them. He thus drives her out

of her ways by adopting and exaggerating them; removes her capriciousness by transforming himself into a bundle of caprices: for he knows, that

“Where two raging fires meet together,
They do consume the thing that feeds their fury.”

And the wonder of it, is the consummate art with which he plays out his forced character. His frolicsome perversity and audacious eccentricity, though sheer affectation, have all the appearance of perfect nature; so innate and spontaneous do his monstrous pranks and blunders seem, that she thinks he is perfectly sincere in them, and acts so because he cannot help it. All the whimsical, fantastic humours he could glean from the fields of experience and of fancy, he hangs about his character, and enacts the madman to perfection out of his abundant sense. His outrageous humour reaches at once its height and its termination when, riding with his wife to visit her father's, he meets old Vincentio, and requires her to salute him as a beautiful young lady.

PET. “Tell me, sweet Kate, and tell me truly too,
Hast thou beheld a fresher gentlewoman?
Such war of white and red within her cheeks!
What stars do spangle heaven with such beauty,
As those two eyes become that heavenly face?
Fair lovely maid, once more good day to thee:—
Sweet Kate, embrace her for her beauty's sake.

KATH. Young budding virgin, fair, and fresh, and sweet,
Whither away: or where is thy abode?
Happy the parents of so fair a child;
Happier the man, whom favourable stars
Allot thee for his lovely bed-fellow.

PET. Why, how now, Kate! I hope thou art not mad;

This is a man, old, wrinkled, faded, withered ;
And not a maiden, as thou sayest he is.

KATH. Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes,
That have been so bedazzled with the sun,
That every thing I look on seemeth green :
Now I perceive thou art a reverend father ;
Pardon, I pray thee, for my mad mistaking."

This, as Hazlitt justly says, is the most perfect piece of inverted sublimity in existence. Kate's prompt compliance tells our hero that his work is done ; and he becomes as rational as any body, the moment she agrees to call his madness wisdom. Such, however, is the strangeness of his proceedings, that one can hardly take much encouragement from his success, which takes off a good deal from the instructiveness of the play ; but this could not be otherwise. The character of Petruchio is not uncommon in the world ; but I believe there is no delineation of it out of Shakspeare, and surely no man will have the temerity to attempt it after him. I have never known a Petruchio, indeed, but I have known many diminutives of him, or approximations towards him.

Nearly the whole of this play is conceived and executed in the very spirit of comic violence. The mere account of the wedding scene at the church is *awfully* ludicrous. It is well that this scene does not come upon the stage ; indeed nothing could be vainer than to bring it there ; for nobody but Petruchio could enact it, and no theatre on earth could hold it ; nor could any audience endure to see it,—it almost kills one to hear of it. The account of the ride home is like it, only, if possible, more so. The whole taming process, indeed, is

dashed off with infinite zest and spirit; the wisest, oddest, absurdest whimsicalities come galloping in upon us with overpowering rapidity. It is as if the comic muse had bestridden the lightning for her Pegasus!—Katharine's—for she must no more be called Kate—Katharine's closing speech is at once elegant, eloquent, poetical, and true. It is worth all the volumes on household virtues, that I know of. Strange that Shakspeare should have known so long ago, what most people still find it so hard to learn; but so it is: yet we do not hear that he belonged to any society “for the diffusion of useful knowledge.”

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

MUCH ADO About Nothing, if not a richer, is a much riper performance than *Taming of the Shrew*. Less rapid in movement, it is much more varied in style and interest, now running into the most grotesque drollery, now rising into almost tragic dignity, now revelling in the most sparkling brilliancy. Its excellencies, however, both in respect of plot and of character, are rather of the striking sort; such as meet us in full view upon a first acquaintance; and involving little of that hidden beauty which requires long search, and then pays us in proportion to the labour it costs. The play, accordingly, has been famous for stage effect ever since the days of Garrick.—Two young noblemen, Claudio and Benedick, together with their prince and his natural brother, returning from a brief but successful war, are entertained by the Governor of Messina. The events of the play lie

chiefly between these persons and Hero, the daughter, and Beatrice, the niece of the Governor. Claudio's heart soon gets entangled in Hero's graces; for even before he went onward to the late-ended action,

“He looked upon her with a soldier's eye;
That liked, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love:
But now he is returned, and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting him how fair young Hero is,
Saying he liked her ere he went to wars.”

Claudio, however, being somewhat modest, and not quite daring to pop the question, the prince agrees to act his part for him at a contemplated masquerade; engaging, that

“In her bosom he'll unclasp his heart,
And take her hearing prisoner with the force
And strong encounter of his amorous tale:”

in a word, he woos and wins her for his friend. But, no sooner is the day of marriage set than the prince's natural brother, being “composed and framed of villainy,” contrives an infernal plot to ruin Hero and blast the hopes of Claudio, by persuading him and the prince that she is false and stale. Stung with resentment at the supposed indignity offered them, they nevertheless conceal their feelings and designs until they are gathered about the marriage altar, when Claudio, instead of taking Hero's hand, rejects her with scorn, and crushes her into insensibility under a load of contumelious

charges, backed up by the authority and testimony of the prince. She swoons, is conveyed out of sight, and mourned as dead by her friends, under a conviction of her innocence, but with the intent, should the charges prove true, of secluding her in a convent. Meanwhile the plot, its agents being overheard in their rejoicings, is detected the moment of its success, and is subsequently brought to light through the blundering simplicity of some police officers, in some scenes of the most indescribable drollery: which disclosure of course brings Hero to life, and sinks Claudio into the deepest sorrow. Still supposing her dead, he joins in mourning for her, and engages to wed an unknown relative of hers, who is given out as her equal in worth, her image in person; and he never suspects the truth till he takes her hand at the altar, when, upon her unmasking, he finds her to be the real Hero herself. The surprise which his conduct at the former meeting caused to others, is equalled by the surprise which he himself experiences at this; and these two scenes are pronounced by Schlegel to be masterpieces of stage effect in the most genuine and justifiable sense.

The characters of Hero and Claudio, though rather beautiful than otherwise in their simplicity and uprightness, offer no very salient points, and are indeed nowise extraordinary. Generally, the events of Shakspeare's plays are interesting mainly for the sake of the persons connected with them; the reverse of which is true in the case before us; the persons being interesting mainly for the events befalling them. Nothing short of Hero's real or apparent death, and of Claudio's real or apparent killing of her, could have made them worthy of dra-

matic representation, and given them interest enough to meet the demands either of the stage or of the closet. Had their course of love run smoother, its voice, even if audible, had been hardly worth our hearing. The most interesting feature in Hero, abundantly beautiful indeed, but by no means uncommon, is that remarked by the good priest at the wedding scene, when she has sunk down beneath the charges heaped upon her :—

“ I have marked
A thousand blushing apparitions start
Into her face ; a thousand innocent shames
In angel whiteness bear away those blushes ;
And in her eye there hath appeared a fire
To burn the errors that these princes hold
Against her maiden truth.”

BENEDICK AND BEATRICE.

THE chief interest of the play is in Benedick and Beatrice, who never meet but that they strike up a merry war of words ; to whom the very sight or thought of each other immediately causes their mouths to spring a-leak with quips, and quirks, and “ bullets of the brain ;” and whose adroit skirmishes and keen encounters of wit furnish several scenes of the most sparkling and brilliant description. Professed rebels against the sweet tyranny of love ; having “ twice or thrice cut Cupid’s bowstring,” so that “ the little hangman dare not shoot at them ;” both are inextricably caught in the same snare, ingeniously laid by their friends, whereby they are made to believe themselves the objects of each other’s secret passion. Their

inability, however, to let each other alone ; their constant flouting and worrying of each other whenever they meet ; and their manifest impatience of each other's scorn or neglect,—should doubtless be understood as proving that they were deeply smitten before, and were kept apart rather by a dread of each other's mocks, than by a want of mutual inclination. In a word, their continual gibing and jeering is one of those flirtations so often preliminary to something else, wherein people, too proud to discover their feelings, yet unable to repress them, endeavour at once to cherish and conceal them by affecting the contrary. The device of their friends therefore is entirely successful ; each is persuaded that the other is almost ready to die of love, and in this persuasion each becomes almost ready to die of love sure enough. The result is as natural as it is happy : it effects at least a sufficient armistice of wit to allow of a courtship ; though even then they stop jesting only when their mouths are stopped by kissing. They are at length married amid flashings of wit and meetings of lips at the same time with their recovered associates ; and we dismiss them in the full conviction of their present happiness, and the strong hope, not unmingled indeed with fear, for their future happiness.

The wit of these two persons, though seeming at first view much the same, is really distinguished by all the difference of sex, and situation, and character. Beatrice discovers more sprightliness, Benedick more strength of mind, by his wit. The union of high intelligence with singular thoughtlessness, Beatrice has little or nothing of reflection in her wit ; but throws it off in bright successive flashes whenever any object administers the

spark to her fancy. Born of the passing thought, and "delivered upon the mellowing of occasion," it seems to come from her as freely, as unconsciously, and as inexhaustibly as her breath. Though of the most piercing keenness, and the most exquisite aptness, there is, however, no trace of ill-nature about it; it stings, indeed, but does not poison; cuts, but hurts not; and we almost fancy that we see it sparkling in her eyes, dancing in her features, and irradiating her whole person with smiles as she utters it. The offsping merely of the moment and the occasion, it strikes the fancy but leaves no trace on the memory; falls,

"Like snow-flakes on a river,
A moment white, then gone forever:"

indeed it will not bear remembering or even repeating; it loses all its edge, ceases to be wit, the moment it is taken out of her lips, and disjoined from the object or the occasion that begets it. But if we forget it as soon as it is uttered, we also feel assured that she forgets it as soon as we do; and we are as sure to remember what she is, as we are to forget what she says. The agility and readiness of her wit are infinite: wherever it may be, the moment one goes to put his hand upon it, he is sure to find or feel it somewhere else. She appears to use it, either for the entertainment of her friends, or because she cannot help it, not because she is vain of it, or wishes to hurt with it. Such is the general quality of her wit; though it assumes a much deeper, richer tone in her impassioned moments, as when, burning with grief and resentment for the inju-

ries heaped on her cousin, she instigates Benedick to kill Claudio; and he vows to do so, or die in the attempt for her love; where she discloses a depth and tenderness of feeling which strikes us the more powerfully for its contrast with all that has hitherto come from her, and shows that, after all, she is a witty woman, and by no means a mere female wit.

The wit of Benedick, on the other hand, is in great part the offspring of reflection, ever growing with the growth, and strengthening with the strength of thought. It therefore finds or makes its own occasion; never waiting for the presence or provocation of others, but pouring itself forth in the greatest perfection and greatest profusion in his solitary musings. With all the pungency and nearly all the pleasantry, it lacks the free spontaneous volubility of hers. Accordingly, in their wit-combats she always gets the better of him, either because he cannot, or, from a feeling of gallantry, will not be up to her; so that she uniformly comes off laughing with an air of triumph, he halting with an air of depression from their jest-breaking encounters. But he makes ample amends when he gets out of her presence; his wit, starting from reflection, gains impetus by going, and he trundles it off in whole paragraphs. In short, if his wit be slower, it is also much deeper and stronger than hers: not so agile and easy in manner, more solid and searching in matter, it shines less, but burns more; and as it springs much less out of the occasion, so it will bear repeating much better than hers. Thus, relating his encounter with her at the masquerade, he says: "An oak with but one green leaf on it, would have answered her; my very visor began to assume life

and scold with her : she told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was the prince's jester ; that I was duller than a great thaw ; huddling jest upon jest, with such impossible conveyance, upon me, that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me ; she speaks poniards, and every word stabs : if her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there were no living near her ; she would infect the north star." Again, speaking to the prince, as he sees her coming : " Will your grace command me any service to the world's end ? I will go on the slightest errand now to the antipodes, that you can devise to send me on ; I will fetch you a tooth-picker now from the farthest inch of Asia ; bring you the length of Prester John's foot ; fetch you a hair off the great Cham's beard ; do you any embassy to the pigmies, rather than hold three word's conference with this harpy."

Hazlitt pronounces Benedick a woman-hater ; why he does so, I know not, unless from a desire to find respectable prototypes for himself. Benedick, it seems to me, is equally removed from a woman-hater and from a lady's-man ; has too much good nature to be the former, too much self-respect to be the latter, and too much wisdom to be either. Indeed, he himself expressly says, " Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none." It is because he cannot help thinking of them, that he is continually cracking jokes about them : it is because he is deeply taken with Beatrice that he so constantly makes her the target of his wit. In natures like his, hatred always manifests itself in contempt ; and contempt would not be continually breaking jests with its object.—To make

two such beings as he and Beatrice sigh like a furnace for each other, without any violence to truth and nature, belongs to but few ; Shakspeare has made it seem far more natural for them to do so than otherwise.—These two characters, though perhaps not very instructive, are among the most entertaining the poet has given us.

LECTURE VII.

TWELFTH NIGHT—ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL—AS YOU LIKE IT.

IN Love's Labour's Lost the persons seem, for most part, to have taken up wit as a distinct pursuit, to have made it a matter of art and study; consequently, their freaks and oddities are more or less a matter of show, and vanity, and emulation; are somewhat strained and far-fetched; the affectations of persons trying to appear what they are not, rather than the free, spontaneous transpiration of innate peculiarities. Doubtless this should be set down mainly to the persons themselves, not to the poet. It all sorts admirably with the extravagant whim of the leading characters, and is indeed one of the excellencies of the play, as a representation of manners. Into Twelfth Night, on the contrary, are poured all the humours and comicalities of which comedy seems capable; yet they all seem to spring up of their own accord. The comic characters are free alike from disguises, and from pretensions; act neither to conceal nor display themselves, but merely to indulge their humours and inclinations; care not whether every body or nobody sees them, so they have their whim out; and give utterance to folly and nonsense, not with a view to provoke laughter or gain notoriety, but simply because they cannot help it. Thus the very deformities of the characters have a sort of grace about

them, since they are genuine, and of nature's planting ; absurdity and extravagance are indigenous to the soil, and shoot up in native, happy luxuriance, without either the checks or the futherances of art and study, as the growth of nature's free productiveness. Hence it is, that we so readily enter, for the time, into a sort of brotherhood with the characters ; enjoy them as a part of ourselves, not as the contrast of ourselves, and laugh at them, or rather with them, not from pride or contempt, but from sympathy. The exhibition of their foibles and follies is done off in such a spirit of good humour, that even the subjects themselves would not be pained thereby, and would rather join with us in laughing than be offended at it. This is certainly true humour in the best and highest sense. In this way generally Shakspeare delights to show off his comic characters in their happiest aspects ; to make them simply ludicrous and diverting, instead of making them ridiculous and contemptible by putting upon them the construction of wit and spleen.

But, rich as is this play in comicalities, it abounds in graces far above the power or the pretension of mere comedy. The romantic parts of it, infinitely different indeed from the general run of love-plays,

" Give a very echo to the seat
Where love is thron'd."

The quintessence of the poetry of love is distilled into them with indescribable and almost unimaginable delicacy, as if it came from a hand at once the most plentiful and the most sparing ; for it is hard to tell whether

the poet delights us more by what he gives or by what he manifestly withholds. Rich in severity and simplicity of colouring, the work is everywhere replete with "the modest charm of not too much;" wears not its graces on its front; its beauty being of that still, deep, retiring sort which it takes one long to find, and forever to exhaust.

Viola, the heroine, and her twin brother Sebastian, who resemble each other almost as much as the brothers in *Comedy of Errors*, are shipwrecked and separated on the coast of Illyria. Each supposes the other drowned. Viola soon learns that Olivia, a wealthy young countess, and the only lady of the place to whom she can with propriety apply for protection,—in deep mourning for the death of a father and brother,—has barred her doors against the admission of strangers. In her helpless and friendless situation, she resolves to disguise her person in male attire, and present herself as a servant to the duke of the place. Her gifts and accomplishments soon admit her into his service, and gain her his unbounded confidence: he "unclasps to her the book even of his secret soul," and employs her as messenger in a desperate love-suit to the countess, who as desperately rejects his suit, and even refuses to hear it. Thus employed, she presently conceives an inextinguishable passion for the duke, and at the same time inspires the countess with a similar passion for herself. Her love for the duke makes her the more eloquent to the countess in his behalf, and her eloquence inflames the countess still more.

"Feeling this youth's perfections,
With an invisible and subtle stealth,
To creep in at her eyes,"

the countess cannot choose but fall to wooing for herself the messenger that is wooing her so eloquently for another. In this perplexity, Viola, feeling her disguise to be a wickedness, and distressed alike with love for the duke, and with pity for the countess, knows not what to do ; “it is too hard a knot for her to untie ;” and she is obliged to resign herself to the help of time and fortune. At length Sebastian finds his way into the place, is mistaken by the countess for the duke’s messenger, and, to his wonder and delight, is sweetly forced to the hymeneal altar by her fair ladyship, that her “most jealous and too doubtful soul may live at peace !” This, of course, brings about a disclosure of Viola’s sex ; when the duke, calling to mind some of her enigmatical expressions, and interpreting them in the light of his new discovery, offers her his hand in marriage, and accordingly takes her to his bosom.

COMIC CHARACTERS.

AROUND and across these more serious parts are continually running and frisking the humours and comicalities of the play ; the connection between which, though perfectly natural and legitimate, is of a kind to be felt, not described. Of the comic scenes and characters I cannot pretend to give any thing more than an outline. Sir Toby Belch, uncle to the countess, a most whimsical, madcap, frolicsome old toper, full of antics, and fond of sprees,—with a plentiful store of wit, and a plentiful lack of money,—never at rest unless he be in a perfect uproar, a very paroxysm of mirth, singing songs all

night, and carousing and drinking healths to his niece, whom he loves so well since she was left sole heir, that he cannot endure to let her mourn or sleep: Sir Andrew Ague-cheek, the aspiring, lack-a-daisical, self-satisfied sequel and shadow of Sir Toby; with a plentiful store of money, and a plentiful lack of wit; whom Sir Toby is stuffing with the preposterous hope of achieving the countess's hand, and, for recompense, dandling him out of his money: Malvolio, the severe, magisterial, sanctimonious, self-love-sick steward; too conscientious in duty to mind his own business; too pious to tolerate mirth in others, because too conceited to be merry himself; and too righteous, because too stupid, to give or take a joke; sometimes "in the sun, practising behaviour to his own shadow," sometimes "quenching his familiar smile with an austere regard of control;" whom "contemplation makes a rare turkey-cock," causing him to strut and "jet under his advanced plumes;" and who "cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths;—the best persuaded of himself, so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his ground of faith, that all who look on him love him:"—these, together with the lively and ingenious jest-devising Maria, the mirth-loving Fabian, and the witty-wise Fool;—these characters, all deeply and distinctly drawn, form a comic assemblage, inferior only to the inimitable Falstaff and his crew, and are doubtless well known to the readers of Shakspeare; at least they can be known only by reading him. The scenes where this jolly troop, headed by that "noble gull-catcher," and "most excellent devil of wit," Maria, bewitch Malvolio into "a contemplative idiot," practising upon his vanity and self-love until he

clothes himself in the aspect of a madman, and they "laugh themselves into stitches" over him, are almost painfully diverting. At length, however, our laughter at his pretentious absurdities, passes into pity for his sufferings, and we feel a degree of resentment towards his ingenious persecutors. Maria's device for drawing him out is but a means of disclosing to others what her superior penetration had discovered long before. She is the very perfection of innocent female mischievousness, with wit to plan and art to execute whatever lies within the province of such a character. That the triumph of her ingenuity should gain her the hand of Sir Toby, and his heart too, if, indeed, he have any, is a termination of their mischievous conspiracy, as happy as it is natural.

Such are the characters, such the proceedings that enrich and enliven the mansion of the countess during the play; the countess herself, calm, cheerful, discreet, hovering around them, sometimes unbending, never forgetting her dignity among them; often checking, oftener enjoying their merry-makings, and emerging occasionally from her seclusion, to be plagued by the duke's message, and bewitched by his messenger: and Viola, always perfect in her part, yet always shrinking from it, appearing among them from time to time on her embassies of love; sometimes a partaker, sometimes a provoker, sometimes the victim, of their mischievous sport. Thus, throughout the play, comic humour and serious passion are blended together in the utmost freedom; the highest and lowest characters being everywhere seen in immediate vicinity and even intercourse with each other, without any apparent consciousness of

their respective ranks : the whole play, in short, representing a state of society long ago extinct of course, where people had not learned to measure their distinction by their distance from one another ; and where, though social distinctions were strongly marked, as indeed they always are in nature, a few did not try to convince themselves and others that they were not of the many by scrupulously avoiding to be with them.

THE DUKE.

THOUGH the principal charm of the play, at least of the serious parts, be in the character of Viola, the duke and countess are by no means uninteresting personages. The duke is represented as in every respect a most elegant and accomplished gentleman, enraptured at the touch of music, and the sport of his own beautiful thick-thronging fancies. His passion, however, for the countess is altogether an affair of the imagination ; lacks the depth and constancy, the self-forgetting, tongue-subduing, action-prompting spirit of a true affection : in a word, it is a mere fancy, not a sentiment, and is accordingly full of fantastical shapes and turns ; it is "unstead and skittish in its motions," capriciously darting from one amusement to another, pleased with many things, yet pleased with nothing long, and so neither taking nor giving any rest : and, but for the exquisite poetry which his richly-gifted intellect breathes into every thing he does and says, his condition would rather provoke our mirth than challenge our sympathy. To use an illustration from another of our poet's plays, the

countess is his Rosalind, not his Juliet, the occasion, not the object of his passion; and perhaps a secret, scarce-conscious persuasion of this fact is the cause of her rejecting his suit. When, therefore, he sees her placed altogether beyond his hope, he has no more trouble about her; finds it as easy to forget her as it had been hard to win her; and builds a true affection there where, his fancy left untouched, so many sweet, tender appeals had been made to his heart. All of which is perfectly natural, and indeed goes so deep into nature, that it must perforce seem unnatural to many.

THE COUNTESS.

NOR has the countess any less claim on our regard. Her graces of mind and manners; her

“Beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature’s own sweet and cunning hand laid on;”

and her sober lady-like dignity of demeanour, form at once an imposing and an attractive figure, such as would justify a far deeper and truer attachment than the duke’s. I say her dignity; for in her advances to the messenger, who did such enchantment upon her, there is condescension without familiarity; her apparent superiority of rank sufficiently precluding any charge of forwardness; while at the same time her conduct evinces a very commendable freedom from pride of birth, and an equally commendable preference of true nobility to mere aristocracy. Her firmness in rejecting his lord-

ship's hand, and frankness in acknowledging his merits :—

“Your lord does know my mind, I cannot love him :
Yet I suppose him virtuous, knew him noble,
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth ;
In voices well divulged, free, learned, and valiant,
And in dimension, and the shape of nature,
A gracious person,”——

approve her one of those to whom

“Love is not love,
When it is mingled with respects, that stand
Aloof from the entire point.”

But she is in all respects queen over herself, though not over her affections ; these she can neither give to the duke, nor withhold from his messenger ; for

“’Tis affirmed
By poets skilled in Nature's secret ways,
That love will not submit to be controlled
By mastery ;”

but she can give herself to whoever has the good fortune to engage them ; and the impassioned eloquence, with which the love-taught Viola pleads the duke's cause, might well find its way to tougher hearts than hers. With her passion for the messenger there is doubtless mingled somewhat of fancy ; nevertheless, it is a woman's love, and therefore in no danger of dying while she lives.

VIOLA.

IN the character and situation of Viola, always so true to herself, yet so skilful in her perilous undertaking, where "all is semblative a woman's part," yet no one ever suspects what she is, there is something inexpressibly touching and beautiful. Doubtless a great part of her secret fascination, is the sweet consciousness of her sex, shining through her masculine attire ; and the inward spiritual grace of female delicacy pervading all her words and actions. For, even in her sportive raileries with the comic characters, exquisitely as she bears her part, there is all the while an inward, instinctive shrinking from her outward actions, touching our sympathies, and reminding us of the sacredness of her person, and making us feel most strongly what she is when she most appears to others what she is not. Thus, as the beatings of her female heart are lost to those about her in her masquerade, so her masquerade is lost to us in the beatings of her female heart ; so that we have not so much a disguise of her sex, as a triumph of its innate beauty over her disguise. The same is the case in her passion for the duke, whereof she never so speaks as to compromise in the least the proprieties of her sex, yet often so speaks that he cannot choose but understand and reciprocate her feelings the moment he learns who she is. Though she was the wooer, it was Providence, not herself, that turned her expressions into declarations of love ; and when he discovers that she was speaking of herself when, prompted by feelings she could not repress, yet dare not avow, she so sweetly told the story of her father's daughter who "never told her love," but

“pined in thought,” and closed her tale with those incomparable lines ;—

“ Was not this love, indeed ?

We men say more, swear more ; but, indeed,

Our shows are more than will ; for still we prove

Much in our vows, but little in our love :—”

when he discovers this, we do not wonder that his heart becomes as much a captive to her, as his fancy had been to the countess. That he would assuredly have fallen in love with her before, had he known her, sufficiently explains and justifies her falling in love with him ; and, indeed, from Olivia’s account of him, we should presume, that with the favour of the gods he might win his way to a much less susceptible heart than hers. His “gracious person” and goodly accomplishments must needs awaken her admiration ; his elevated character and spotless life, her respect ; his chivalrous delicacy of honour, her confidence ; his sleepless, unrequited love, her pity ; his confiding generosity, her gratitude ; and out of these noble sentiments, fed and fostered by so rich and genial a soil, could hardly choose but spring the still nobler flower of love. Viola’s love, however, has none of the skittishness and unrest which mark the duke’s passion for Olivia : complicated out of all the elements of her richly-gifted and sweetly-tempered nature, it is strong without violence ; never mars the innate modesty of her character ; is deep as life, tender as infancy, as pure, peaceful, and unchangeable as the heavens.

The play of *Twelfth Night*, in addition to external evidence, has abundant internal evidence of having

been written in the fulness and maturity of the poet's powers. Perhaps there is no one of his plays wherein art appears so much a secret unto itself; that is, so perfect in its workings as not only to conceal them, but even to be unconscious of them; as if from imitation of nature it had insensibly passed into identification with her. Notwithstanding the intense study and meditation which it must have cost the poet, there is everywhere a calm, majestic repose about it, like a magnificent lake, sleeping in the breathless quiet of a summer evening, and imaging back the heavens with their starry treasures from its silent crystal depths. The play, however, seems but moderately adapted to the uses of the stage: its beauty, like that of the heroine, is of too delicate and ethereal a cast to produce much theatrical effect, and can be fully caught only by the reflective imagination in the stillness and retirement of the closet.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

ALL'S Well That Ends Well differs very materially from the plays hitherto noticed, in that the serious parts decidedly preponderate, both in quantity and in quality, over the comic. Exuberant, indeed, of humour in some of its scenes and characters, it is enriched far beyond the power or the pretension of comedy with the deepest yet mildest and sweetest wisdom both of nature and of experience. Wrinkled age and blooming youth, with whatever can dignify the one and adorn the other, are brought before us, and each in beauty and sweetness seems striving to outdo the other.

The orphan daughter of a physician, who, it is said, "was skilful enough to have lived still, if knowledge could be set up against mortality," has been brought up in the family of the Duke of Rousillon. The venerable countess, now a widow, has ever been to Helena, as the best of mothers, and Helena in return has been to the countess as the best of daughters. The young count, Bertram, the playmate of her childhood, and heir to the riches and honours of the house, she has loved so long and so entirely, that the affection seems rather to have been born with her than to have sprung up within her. Aware of her origin but not of her worth, she has forgotten herself only to think of him, and of the seemingly impassable distance that separates her from him. Though fully persuaded, that,

"It were all one
That she should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it, he is so above her ;"

and that,

"In his bright radiance and collateral light
She must be comforted, not in his sphere ;"

still she cannot choose but love him ; feels that she cannot live without him, yet knows not how to win him.

The play opens with the count's departure to the court of France, whither he has been summoned to meet his peers by the venerable king who, at once obeyed as absolute sovereign and loved as beneficent father by his people, is now afflicted past hope with a disease that has baffled all the medical skill within his

reach. Upon this occasion the thought springs up in Helena's mind, and will not down, she knows not why or wherefore, that she is to save the life of the king, and thereby secure the hand and heart of the count.

“Her father left her some prescriptions
Of rare and proved effects, such as his reading,
And manifest experience, had collected
For general sovereignty : amongst the rest,
There is a remedy, approved, set down,
To cure the desperate languishes, whereof
The king is rendered lost.”

Though utterly unable to conceive how she shall rule her efforts to a favourable issue, still

“There's something hints,
More than her father's skill, which was the greatest
Of his profession, that his good receipt
Shall, for her legacy, be sanctified
By the luckiest stars of Heaven.”

Haunted by this mysterious suggestion, and at the same time prompted by the feeling that for her “there is no living, none, if Bertram be away,” and therewithal encouraged by the knowledge, or perhaps the ignorance, “that none who ever strove to show her merit, missed her love,” she resolves to make the trial ;—

“Her project may deceive her,
But her intents are fixed, and will not leave her.”

The aged countess, her more than mother, having drawn from her, with infinite kindness and address, an acknowledgment both of her passion and her purpose, and heart-

ily approving of them both, dismisses her to the king's court with due attendance, enriched with a mother's blessing, and aided by a mother's prayers. She arrives at court, cures the king, and is rewarded, according to her desire, with the choice of a husband from his young nobility. Of course her choice lights upon Bertram who, scorning her humble birth, though forced to give her his hand in marriage, still refuses to treat her as his wife, and immediately flies from her presence to engage in a war between two neighbouring nations, where he soon crowns himself with public honour, and covers himself with private shame. In the disguise of a pilgrim, Helena immediately abandons her home, repairs to the scene of her husband's exploits, there falls in with the object of his criminal passion, and is thus enabled to fulfil the seemingly impossible condition on which he has engaged to receive and love her as his wedded wife. Again she meets him at the French court, demonstrates her claim to the redemption of his pledge, and subdues and wins his heart as effectually as she had before won his hand.

HELENA.

ON the whole, the character of Helena must, I think, though not without some hesitation, be pronounced the crowning triumph of Shakspeare's genius over the difficulties of the subject. Which difficulties were, to represent her as doing what perhaps were unpardonable in anybody else, yet as acting on such grounds, from such motives, by such means, and to such issues, that the undertaking not only is, but even appears altogether com-

mendable in her. These difficulties the poet seems to have fully understood; to have felt, that something like a mysterious, supernatural impulse to the course she pursues, together with all the reverence and authority of the wise old countess, would be required to bring her off in dignity and honour. And perhaps, after all, nothing but her success could fully vindicate and sanction her proceedings, because no one could so enter into her mind, her keenness of perception and purity of intention, as to appreciate beforehand the propriety and practicability of her undertaking. Claiming to be mysteriously guided and impelled, the issue seems in a manner to accredit and authenticate her claim: moreover, looking backwards from the event, whence we can take in at one view all her means and motives, we may recognize the wisdom of her original purpose; whereas, looking forward from that purpose, we should anticipate nothing but failure and disgrace from the attempt. Perhaps this is the only instance where the poet does not conquer the difficulties of his subject without betraying his exertions, and where he seems consciously to have struggled with them, until he knew and felt that he had mastered them. Accordingly, though the heroine treads the very abysses of humiliation, where every coming step seems about to sink her in irremediable disgrace, yet with such skill and delicacy is the representation managed, that she loses not a whit of our confidence or respect.

Helena is described by those who best know her, as "inheriting her dispositions and achieving her goodness;" and withal as one

"Whose beauty did astonish the survey
Of richest eyes; whose words all ears took captive;

Whose dear perfection, hearts that scorned to serve,
Humbly called mistress."

And indeed for depth, sweetness, solidity, and efficiency of character, she is not surpassed by any of the poet's heroines. With the finest of gifts most finely cultivated; full of sagacity, gentleness, and resolution; equally apt and able of eye to see, of heart to feel, and of hand to do; in short,

"The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;
A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, and command;"—

she almost realizes the ideal combination of intelligence, sensibility, and moral energy, which has been justly regarded as the rarest and richest endowment of humanity. Intense reflection seems to have been the constant habit, I might almost say pastime of her mind; and the results of the deepest thought come from her, in brief, sententious style, with almost the facility and felicity of inspiration. With her, however, reflection is rather an impulse than a clog to action; she thinks as calmly as if she never had to act, yet acts as quickly as if she never had to think. Until the departure of the count, her love for him seems to have been rather a sentiment than a passion, or rather an intermediate something uniting the repose of the one with the energy of the other.

"To see him every hour; to sit and draw
His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
In her heart's table; heart too capable
Of every line and trick of his sweet favour;"—

was indeed essential to her ; but she seems scarcely to have wished for any thing more : in a word, though she cannot live away from him, yet she would live only for him ; to see him or to make him happy, satisfies her ; and her chief regret is,

“ That wishing well hath not a body in ’t,
That might be felt : that she, the poorer born,
Whose baser stars do shut her up in wishes,
Might with the effects of them follow her friends.”

Nor does her force and rectitude of thought ever in the least desert her, or suffer her feelings, strong as they are, to betray her into the slightest self-delusion. This is apparent in the unbosoming of herself to the countess, where, with a reluctance of modesty that yields only to her regard for truth, she says :

“ Then, I confess,
Here on my knee, before high heaven and you,
That before you, and next unto high heaven ;
I love your son :—
My friends were poor, but honest ; so ’s my love :
Be not offended ; for it hurts not him,
That he is loved of me : I follow him not
By any token of presumptuous suit ;
Nor would I have him, till I do deserve him ;
Yet never know how that desert should be.
I know I love in vain, strive against hope ;
Yet, in this captious and intenable sieve,
I still pour in the waters of my love,
And lack not to lose still : thus, Indian-like,
Religious in mine error, I adore
The sun, that looks upon his worshipper,
But knows of him no more. My dearest madam,
Let not your hate encounter with my love,

For loving where you do : but if yourself,
 Whose aged honour cites a virtuous youth,
 Did ever, in so true a flame of liking,
 Wish chastely, and love dearly, then give pity
 To her, whose state is such, that cannot choose
 But lend and give, where she is sure to lose ;
 Who seeks not to find that her search implies,
 But, riddle-like, lives sweetly where she dies."

Thus, though she sees nothing but impossibilities between herself and the count, still there is a sort of invincible religious faith in her love, that overmasters her sight ; so that, without hope, she displays all the energy and resolution that hope can inspire ; and therefore never, like Viola, pines in thought, nor waits a moment for time or fortune to work out her deliverance : for 'tis her faith as well as speech, that

"Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
 Which we ascribe to heaven : the fated sky
 Gives us free scope ; only doth backward pull
 Our slow designs."

Having, by the help of the king, made a conquest over the count, she then, by the help of heaven, and as if inspired of heaven, goes to work, more for his sake than for her own, to make a conquest within him. With her fine faculties wide awake, and her fine feelings keenly alive to the nature of what she undertakes, she proceeds to the most hopeless tasks, and submits to the most degrading expedients, as if she recognized neither the hopelessness of the one, nor the degradation of the other. And the wonder of it is, that she should do all this without losing our respect ; which doubtless could not be, but that she manifestly does all for another, none for

herself. In other words, she makes us see and feel, that she truly loves the count, not herself in him ; a love that seeks, and must be seeking his good, to the annulling, and even the sacrificing of herself ; and this perfect, manifest disinterestedness of spirit preserves, nay, heightens our regard for her, even when she is in a condition most discouraging to it. Doing, or seeming to do what she does, for herself, it had been shameful to her ; manifestly doing it for another, it is but honourable to her. In a word, it is the triumph of the inward and essential over the outward and accidental. She disrobes herself of all her woman's pride, disclaims all the external rights and regards of her sex, and casts off all the princely favours of her sovereign, only to make us feel the innate beauty and goodness of her character. Her whole being is radiant of a spiritual grace, which the lowest and ugliest situation cannot obscure ; and which the murky vapours that she descends and walks amidst, serve only to catch and transmit, as veiling clouds transmit the glory of the setting sun. Nay more ; her innate beauty and goodness not only redeem herself from the disgraces of her situation, but are even the redemption of her husband's character. What she is secures our respect, not only to what she does, but also to him for whom she does it ; for it is not to be denied, that her love for the count is the brightest spot in his character.

BERTRAM.

COUNT BERTRAM, however, is one of those characters whom the world can hardly be brought to treat with

justice, because their greatest sin is against the world ; for the most unpardonable sins are always those committed against ourselves. Were his lordship content to be more a man of nature's making, and less a man of his ancestors' making, he would be a highly respectable and respected person. In a word, his greatest vice and greatest misfortune, is an inordinate family pride. Like many others who bury the gifts of nature in ancestral napkins, he prides himself on his elevation of rank in proportion as he lacks individual merit. Like them, too, he even prostitutes his hereditary honours into exemption from the restraints of virtue, and perverts the privileges of his order into a dispensation from the responsibilities of man. Thus family pride which, properly regulated, is one of the strongest motives to good, with him becomes only a license to evil. He probably thinks to tie up the tongue of truth, and the hand of justice with his father's garter, and of course disgraces himself in proportion as he presumes on the grace of his ancestors. Accordingly, while enwreathing his brows with military laurels, he at the same time stains his life with the guilt, though not with the act, of seduction ; for, unless a man have virtues in himself, he will naturally turn his conditional advantages into vices ; failing to improve him, they will tempt and betray him. And the same mean and miserable pride which leads the count to scorn and abuse one of the noblest and best of women, also subjects him to the abuse, makes him the dupe of one of the meanest and vilest of men, a most unmitigable puppy and wagtail, whom Helena,—such insight waiteth on humility—sees quite through from the beginning ;

“ Knows him a notorious liar,
Thinks him a great way fool, solely a coward.”

If, then, such being his lordship's character, it be asked, what reason has Helena for loving him ? the answer is, she has a woman's reason, as she ought to have ; she loves him, because she loves him ; and there would probably be more of virtue and more of happiness in the world, if more of us loved for the same reason : for, if we look well to it, we shall find, that

“ We must love men, ere to us
They will seem worthy of our love ;”

and that all right affections justify to themselves the objects that inspire them. She probably did not think to weigh him nicely in the balance of self-love, before she loved him ; and, had she done so, she had been unworthy even of him. In short, her love springs not so much from his worth as from her own. It is one of the beauties of her character, that with her sure-sighted, far-seeing intelligence she is blind to nothing but his faults ; and is not blind to them, but rather sees through them into a worth which they conceal from others. And perhaps it is to accredit her perception, to approve her judgment of him, to make us willing to see with her eyes and trust in her discernment, that she is represented as understanding so perfectly from the first the character of his favourite. She knows very well, indeed, that he scorns to receive her as his wife, but then she also knows why he does so ; that it is not herself, but her condition, that he scorns ; a scorn which she does not regard as an insult, because her own mind is so far

above it. The truth is, she has known and loved him in his childhood, when he wore the sweetness, simplicity, and innocence of youth; before the better elements of his nature were crusted over and obscured by the silly and stupid conceit of hereditary honours: and she has a right feeling and a reasonable faith, that beneath the follies and vices which have overspread his character, there is still an undercurrent of sense and virtue, a wisdom of nature, not dead, but sleeping within him, whereby he may be saved to her and to himself. Notwithstanding, therefore, his haughtiness, and petulance, and obstinacy, she neither justifies nor condemns him, but simply tries to reform him: instead of meeting scorn with scorn, and pride of birth with pride of sex, she endeavours to raise him above so mean a sentiment, and to open his eyes upon her, as she has opened hers upon him. Through the very vices into which his pride and passion betray him, she seeks to awaken shame and remorse, knowing that these, once awakened, will twist his vices into a scourge to whip down his pride; and that the mind in which one true virtue is truly developed, will hardly rest until it have developed all the sister virtues. Accordingly, by a discipline of manifold shames and disgraces, his “undivulged crimes” and “pent-up guilts” being ripped up and blown in his face, and the truth being forced home upon him, that in his haughty, scornful littleness, he has rejected an angel, and taken to his bosom a most cowardly and contemptible braggart; by these means his pride of birth is at last broken down, and his manhood set free; he ceases to adore his rank as soon as he comes to adorn it; and be-

gins to respect her as a woman, the moment he learns to respect himself as a man, not as a title.

That she loves him, therefore, is in nowise a reproach to her, for the simple reason that she cannot help it ; nay, it proves that her sight is deeper, not that her love is cheaper, than ours : that she finally opens his pride-bound heart to confess her worth, and thereby *makes* a road to her wishes, is plainly due to her wisdom and virtue. And she forgives him sooner than we do, not because her knowledge is less, but because her goodness is more, than ours. Viewing him, however, through our own eyes, not through hers, we of course condemn him ; for she looks at him through the eye of hope, we through the eye of memory ; she regards what he will be after, we what he has been before, reformation. For the poet does not unfold the fruits of his humiliation, but only the promise and prospect of them : apparently regarding her well-approved rectitude of perception and feeling as sufficient argument of hope in him. Which, it seems to me, sufficiently explains the differences of critics concerning him ; some measuring him by her judgment, others by their own. And indeed, it must be confessed, she acts not unlike one inspired ; seems moved by an impulse which she cannot resist, and guided by a light of which she knows not the source ; a light and an impulse therefore of which we are hardly competent to judge : which, perhaps, is the very thing that in her lowest condition causes her not only to be, but even to appear most exalted.—The groundwork of this picture Shakspeare is supposed to have borrowed from Boccaccio ; the coloring, I take it, came fresh from heaven and nature and his own heart.

THE COUNTESS.

THE venerable countess is one of those divine old creatures whom it does one good to contemplate. Mild, cheerful, and benignant, religion and prosperity have met together in her, each lending its grace to the other, and now after many years of virtue and happiness,

“ An old age serene and bright,
And lovely as a Lapland night,
Doth lead her to her grave.”

The flowers have indeed perished from her features ; but their falling hath disclosed the sweetness they were sent to gather in ; and with the rich sober fruits of her autumn we wish not back the laughing graces of her spring. She has experienced all that rank, and titles, and attendance can give, but her inborn grace of mind has taught her to despise them all, when thrown into the scale against the sacred spirit of humanity. Full of matronlike dignity, she is also full of childlike gentleness ; the loftiest station is not above her censure, nor the lowliest beneath her fellowship ; and she knows the better how to prize virtue, for that she has seen the vanity of every thing else. The farewell blessing upon her son, when he is leaving for the court, is too beautifully characteristic to be omitted :

“ Be thou blest, Bertram, and succeed thy father
In manners as in shape ! thy blood, and virtue,
Contend for empire in thee ; and thy goodness
Share with thy birthright ! Love all, trust a few,
Do wrong to none : be able for thine enemy
Rather in power, than use ; and keep thy friend

Under thy own life's key : be checked for silence,
 But never taxed for speech. What heaven more will,
 That thee may furnish, and my prayers pluck down,
 Fall on thy head !”

In her breast “adoption strives with nature ;” as she grieves over Bertram’s follies with a mother’s grief, so she rejoices over Helena’s virtues with a mother’s joy ; indeed,

“ Which of them both
 Is dearest to her, she has no skill in sense
 To make distinction ;”—

feels, that

“ There is nothing in France too good for him,
 But only she ;”—

and that

“ He cannot thrive,
 Unless her prayers, which heaven delights to hear
 And loves to grant, relieve him from the wrath
 Of greatest justice :”

in short, she makes herself truly a mother in love, where nature has denied her a mother’s honour ; and, in the bounty that overflows upon her orphan charge, she dreams not but she receives a greater blessing than she gives. In her age, too, notwithstanding her just appreciation of the wisdom it hath brought her, she still travels back with enthusiastic delight to the fountain whence hath flowed the deep, rich stream of her life, and never forgets, as so many younger people do, that

“ It is the show and seal of nature’s truth,
 Where love’s strong passion is impressed in youth.”

Perhaps I shall be pardoned, and perhaps I shall not, for saying that this being, so meek, and sweet, and venerable, often reminds me of an old, old gentlewoman, who used to totter in aged gentleness and wrinkled loveliness before me ; whose presence was the only light, whose voice the only music, of my childhood ; and who gave me those earliest impressions which will cleave to me till my latest breath ; which I could not part with if I would, and would not if I could. She used to rehearse me the simple, touching old ballads of Abraham's sacrifice and the Babes in the woods : I understood a beauty in the words, but did not understand the words ; and I never have heard, nor do I ever expect to hear, any more such divinely-enchancing eloquence as that. How the heavenly old child used to get perfectly rapt in the story, and how I used to hang upon her lips with breathless interest !—true is it,

“Memory, like sleep, hath powers which dreams obey, -
Dreams, vivid dreams, that are not fugitive :
How little that she cherishes is lost !”

PAROLLES.

IN the character of Captain Parolles, that prince of braggarts, that valiant word-gun, that *pronoun* of a man ; a marvellous compound of wit, volubility, impudence, rascality, and poltroonery ; whose “soul is his clothes,” and whose tongue is his sword ; who “lies three thirds, and uses a known truth to pass a thousand nothings with ;” and who seems “created on purpose for men to breathe themselves upon ;”—in this egregious bug-bear

of pretension and shadow in man's clothing, with his shallow impositions and substantial exposures,—there is matter enough, as hath been said, for a whole comedy. How one so unspeakably mean, and withal so perfectly aware of his meanness, can endure to stay with himself; that he does not cut his own acquaintance, forget his own name, forswear his own company; in a word, “that he should know what he is, and be that he is,”—is indeed a marvel that we could hardly believe, did we not sometimes see it actually proved. This remarkable person gets the best unfolding of himself from the sly, shrewd, courtly, eccentric old Lord Lafeu, who is quite as witty as he, and, withal, as wise, upright, valiant, and generous, as witty: “I did think thee, for two ordinaries, to be a pretty wise fellow; thou didst make tolerable vent of thy travel; it might pass: yet the scarfs, and the bannerets, about thee, did manifoldly dissuade me from believing thee a vessel of too great a burden. I have now found thee; when I lose thee again, I care not: yet art thou good for nothing but the taking up; and that thou art scarce worth.” But the count, though his eye be naturally good enough, has just the sort of pride to blind him to the character of any one who, with but tolerable adroitness, will flatter him. That the goddess, whom he worships, does not whisper in his ear the meanness of his confidant; that she even suffers him to take nearest his heart such a windbag of imposture, whom others know to be “a most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise-breaker, the owner of no one good quality,”—is an exquisite piece of dramatic retribution; for it is but just and natural, that he who sets his heart so entirely on the gilt bauble

of hereditary pretension, should be allowed to hug a gilded puff-ball, until his hugging cause it to burst and smoke in his face. That his lordship should be made to "see his company anatomized; that he might take a measure of his own judgments, wherein he had so curiously set this counterfeit," is among the most admirable and judicious things in the play. We do not wonder, that his scorn of unpretending worth begins to give way, when he is brought to see by what a worthless pretender he has been so egregiously duped. In a word, he is effectually whipped into another man by the presence of his embossed and unplumed favourite. Though the joke is pushed upon Parolles to the farthest extreme, we never feel like crying out to his persecutors, hold, enough! as in the case of Malvolio: we make all possible reprisals upon him without the least compunction; for the mere fact of his being such a self-conscious and self-satisfied "lump of counterfeit ore" is an offence for which infinite shame and ridicule are hardly a sufficient indemnification.

Few of Shakspeare's plays are more replete with instruction than this. Its comparative freedom from merely poetical attractions looks as if the poet fully felt the intrinsic beauty of his materials, and saw that the graces and adornings of imagination, if lavished upon them, would but hide a beauty greater than their own; and he makes us feel, that the quiet sagelike wisdom, and the sweet sad spirit of humanity, which pervade it, are far more precious than all the riches which even his transcendent imagination could display.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

As You Like It is as full of happy grace, as All's Well That Ends Well is of wholesome instruction. Schlegel has remarked with characteristic felicity, that in this play "the poet seems to have aimed at showing, that nothing is wanting to call forth the poetry which has its dwelling in nature and the human mind, but to throw off all artificial restraint, and restore both to their native liberty." As a representation of life and character, its pretensions are doubtless somewhat moderate, for it rather takes us out of the actual world than carries us deeper into it, and, submitting the shows of things to the higher anticipations of the soul, violates our poor experience to gratify our nobler desires. Accordingly the play is replete with a sense of beauty so delicate, yet so intense, and a humanity so smiling, yet so divine, that I cannot find in my heart to wish it other than it is. And perhaps the picture is all the more grateful for that it bodies forth the promises rather than the performances of human life; what we look for rather than what we find; and how things might be, not how they are.

The events of the play would form a narrative too lengthy for my space; and such a narrative can the better be dispensed with, forasmuch as what is done is of little interest compared to what is thought, and felt, and said.—Through the treachery and violence of a brother, a noble and virtuous prince has been driven from his home and inheritance into exile. Friendship, stronger than blood and self-interest, has carried

several of his noble subjects into voluntary exile along with him. Escaping from the solitude of a society, where to be wise and good, is to be feared and suspected, they have found society answering to their hearts' desire amid the solitudes of nature. The daughter of the banished duke, hitherto retained at the court of her usurping uncle, until her virtues and misfortunes have excited his jealous hatred, is also at length driven into exile, and finds her way into the vicinity of her father. Drawn by a sisterly attachment, stronger than the ties of home, and kindred, and fortune, her cousin, the usurper's daughter, for whose sake she has hitherto been kept at court and is now banished, escapes along with her. In their mutual affection, and in the perpetual humour of a witty court fool, whom they easily persuade to go with them, they seem to possess, with but one important exception, all the treasures they have the heart to ask, or the world has power to give. A generous youth, moreover, hastening from an elder brother's cruelty, and accompanied by an old and trusty servant, likewise resorts to the same place, where he soon has an opportunity to disarm the hatred of his pursuing and persecuting brother, by saving his life at the imminent risk of his own. These persons, together with the rustic pastoral natives of the place, make up the motley but merry society of the forest of Arden.

Thus throughout the play we have selfishness disjoining those whom nature hath united, and friendship uniting those whom nature hath disjoined. Envy, jealousy, avarice, revenge, all the passions, in short, that afflict and degrade society, they have left in the city behind them. With truth for its playmate and nature for

its guide, the human heart here puts forth its blossoms afresh, and makes the forest vocal with its music; for "lips that may forget love in the crowd cannot forget it here." They have brought with them all the intelligence and refinement of the court, without any of its vanities or vexations; all the graces of art and all the simplicities of nature have met together in joyous, loving sisterhood. Nature throws her protecting arms around them; beauty pitches her tents before them; heaven rains its riches upon them: with "no enemy but winter and rough weather," peace hath taken up her abode with them; and they have nothing to do but "fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world." To the duke and his "co-mates and brothers in exile,"

"Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel they but the penalty of Adam,
The seasons' difference; as, the icy fang,
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon the body,
Even till it shrinks with cold, they smile, and say,—
This is no flattery; these are counsellors
That feelingly persuade them what they are.
Sweet are the uses of adversity;
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this their life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing:"

they have the inward, happy grace,

"That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style."

Dwelling amid pastoral influences, and subsisting on the products of the chase, without being shepherds they present the ideal perfection of pastoral life. Even the necessities of their perishable nature but minister occasions and motives to generous feeling and noble sentiment.

Perhaps there is no other work of the poet's wherein we so much feel the propriety of Milton's tribute to him :

“And sweetest Shakspeare, Fancy's child,
Warbles his native wood-notes wild.”

The play is instinct with woodland associations ; the spirit of the place is upon its inhabitants, its genius within them : we almost breathe with them the fragrance of the forest, and listen to

“The melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,”

and feel

“The Power, the Beauty, and the Majesty,
That have their haunts in dale, or piny mountain,
Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly spring.”

Even the court fool, however crystallized into his vocation, gets thawed by the influences of the place, and experiences a sort of spiritual rejuvenescence, so that his wit catches at every turn the fresh hues and odours of his new whereabouts. For it is hard to say whether man or nature changes most when they are brought and kept together. Mutually sympathetic, each puts on the other's likeness, and they become resonant of each other's voice and redolent of each other's breath. Truly,

“One impulse from a vernal wood
 May teach us more of man,
 Of moral evil and of good,
 Than all the sages can.”

I know of no other poem in English so replete as this with the heart's finer fragrance: but it is the fragrance of the crushed rather than the smiling flower; a fragrance that saddens indeed, but only to purify and instruct. The mutual life-deep attachment between the princesses is one of Shakspeare's sweetest pictures. Instinct with the soul of moral beauty and of female tenderness, it strikes home to the very seat of grace within us. No wonder, that the poet's mind, enriched with such a conception, became redundant of beautiful thoughts and images. The history of their dual unity, painted with such witchery of perspective;—

“We still have slept together,
 Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together;
 And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
 Still we went coupled and inseparable;”—

reveals the inmost life of friendship, and tells us beforehand that the banishment of one must be the banishment of both; while Celia's expression:—

“Pr'ythee, be cheerful; know'st thou not, the duke
 Hath banished me, his daughter?——
 No? hath not? Rosalind then lacks the love,
 Which teaches me that thou and I are one;—

falls upon the ear like music out of heaven. The attachment between the banished duke and his compan-

ions, and that between the faithful old servant, Adam, and his persecuted young master, are of a piece with that between the princesses. As much alike, perhaps, as the differences of age, of sex, and of situation, would allow, they all go to show the rich productiveness of the human heart, when its soil is disencumbered of the usurping vices, follies, and passions, of artificial life. And yet, surpassingly beautiful as is the representation, it strikes us rather as a disclosure of the real than as a creation of the ideal ; the poet seems to bring us nothing new, but only to lend us eyes wherewith to read the old : and when we look through them, we wonder that we have never before seen the things whereon we have always been gazing.

Of several of the characters it is hard telling which have most claim on our attention. Properly speaking, the play has no hero ; for it is purely a drama of sentiment and character, not of action. Though Orlando, the persecuted younger brother, occupies the foreground, the characters are strictly co-ordinate ; the very design of the work precluding any subordination among them. Diverted by fortune from all their cherished plans and purposes, they pass before us in just that moral and intellectual dishabille which best reveals their inborn graces of heart and mind. Accordingly, as, indeed the name itself imports, the plot, like Wordsworth's river, "windeth at its own sweet will," the beginning apparently taking no thought of the end, the end never troubling itself to gather up the several threads into a catastrophe. Every thing, in a word, falls out just as it likes, and just as we like too, if willing to be delighted and instructed, without beating our brains about the why

and wherefore. All the events dancing up as it were spontaneously and at random, the play exhibits that rare perfection of art, which makes us forget but that we are amid the freedoms and negligences of nature.

ORLANDO.

ORLANDO is a model of a young gentleman, who, without any occasion for heroism, displays the qualities of a hero. Brave, gentle, modest and magnanimous ; never thinking of his birth but to avoid dishonouring it ; in his noble-heartedness himself forgetting, and causing us to forget his nobility of rank,—he is just such a man as every other true man would choose for his best friend. “Never schooled, yet learned ; full of noble device ; of all sorts enchantingly beloved,” it is but natural that fraternal envy and hate should have turned his virtues into “sanctified and holy traitors” to him. That his humblest servant should also be his highest eulogist, is a happy illustration of the poet’s skill in making his characters reflect one another while expressing themselves. Their generous oblivion of self and solicitude for each other affords a delightful picture of “the antique world, where service sweat for love and duty, not for hire,” and beautifully exemplifies the power of affection in two noble natures coming over the widest diversities of rank. Orlando’s tilt of wit with the melancholy Jaques, upon their first interview, proves him at once no less wise and good than witty : his uniform abstinence on other occasions from using powers so brilliant, yet so mischievous, discovering a strength of principle still more

admirable than the powers themselves. We hardly know which to prefer, his skill in repelling attacks, or his virtue in never making or provoking them.

JAQUES.

THIS Jaques is one of the most unique and individual characters in Shakspeare. Enraptured out of his five wits at the voice of a song; thrown into a paroxysm of laughter at sight of the motley-clad and motley-brained fool, so that "his lungs begin to crow like chanticleer, that fools should grow so deep-contemplative;" free alike from hatred and from love, and interested in nothing but for the melancholy reflections it suggests to him; and shedding the dusky twilight of his saddened imagination over all the darker spots of human life and character,—he is a model specimen of an utterly useless, yet perfectly harmless man, seeking wisdom by abjuring its first principle. He does nothing but think, yet avowedly thinks to no purpose; and weeps, whether he have occasion or not, merely from a sweet ecstasy of woe, and for the sweet luxury of tears. He has himself enumerated all the kinds of melancholy save his own, which I take to be the melancholy of self-love. His melancholy, however, is perfectly free from misanthropy; for he is too refined an epicure of emotion to harbour such a disagreeable feeling. He loves himself too well to hate anybody; it would mar his luxury of sorrow. Among the cheerful, cheerless only he, because happy faces offer no salient points to his habitual meditations, so that the sight of them corks him up, not stirs him up, or

blows him out, not draws him out. In short he is a sentimentalist ; one of

“The sluggard Pity’s vision-weaving tribe,
Who sigh for wretchedness, yet shun the wretched,
Nursing in some delicious solitude
Their slothful loves and dainty sympathies :”

one who, sick of self-love, mistakes his sickness for compassion and conscience ; whose pity is unembittered with the least care for its object ; whom another’s grief only tickles into a state of agreeable emotion ; who uses the sufferings of man and beast as a sort of onions to open the sluices of his eyes with ; and who, if he found no pain to weep over, would perhaps inflict some, that he might have the pride and pleasure of weeping over it. As is generally the case with such characters, his perpetual railing at the world is easily enough accounted for ;

“For he himself has been a libertine
As sensual as the brutish sting itself.”

Sad, somewhat sulky, and withal not a little affected, his sadness prevents disgust at his affectation, and his affectation prevents pain at his sadness ; while his perennial fulness of matter makes his company always delightful. On the whole, the delineation is perhaps the finest piece of irony on sentimentalism extant ; yet the irony is so tempered with good-nature, as almost to make us fall in love with the subject.

Touchstone with his witty affectation of learned folly and profound nonsense is the most amusing of all Shakespeare’s privileged characters. His humorous con-

tempt of appearances, in choosing out the simplest and ugliest country wench for his spouse, is an admirable burlesque on the rather ultra-democratic situations and proceedings of those about him; and his learned discourse on the punctilios of honour seems a very fit lesson for certain sprigs of fashionable chivalry.

ROSALIND.

BUT the crowning feature of the play, is Rosalind who, volatile and voluble, talks on forever, and we wish her to talk on forever. For wit, this strange, queer, lovely creature is fully equal, perhaps superior to Beatrice, yet no more like her than she is like Falstaff. A soft, subtle, nimble essence, consisting in one knows not what, and springing up one can hardly tell how, her wit neither cuts, bites, stings, nor burns; but plays lightly, briskly, and airily, over all things within its reach, enriching, adorning, and enlivening them; so that one could not desire a greater pleasure than to be the continual theme of it. In its irrepressible and inexhaustible vivacity it waits not for occasion, but dances forth in a perpetual stream, as if her very breath were manufactured into wit by some intellectual heaven-made perpetual motion; insomuch that we can scarce conceive but that her dreams are made up of cunning, quirkish, graceful fancies. Her heart is a perennial fountain of affectionate cheerfulness; even her deepest sighs are breathed forth in a wrappage of innocent mirth; and an arch smile of playfulness irradiates her saddest tears. No trial can break, no misfortune can

damp, no sorrow can chill, her flow of spirits ; in the constant playful gushings of her sweetly-tempered nature, even when she tries to chide, "faster than her tongue doth make offence, her eye doth heal it up."—Equally marked is the difference between Rosalind and Viola, in respect of their disguise. For Viola, as hath been said, never forgets, nor allows us to forget, for a moment, that she is not what she seems ; she feels, and makes us feel, all the while, that she is playing a part which is foreign and irksome to her ; whereas the other seems as much at home in her assumed character as in her real one ; though she manifestly has no doublet and hose in her disposition, those garments appear to set as easy upon her person as if she had always worn them. She enters into her part with such infinite spirit, that we hardly have time or cause to think who she is ; for she is resolved that,

"In her heart

Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will,
She'll have a swashing and a martial outside ;
As many other mannish cowards have,
That do outface it with their semblances:"—

yet it is hard to say, whether Viola's sleepless disquiet, or Rosalind's perfect composure, under the contradiction between her dress and her sex, be more expressive of maiden modesty. This difference is partly owing, perhaps, to their different situations ; Viola's person being as much exposed by the rudeness, as Rosalind's is protected by the courtesy, of those about her. The difference, however, is chiefly in the persons themselves. Viola is mostly concerned for the proprieties of her real,

Rosalind, for those of her assumed character ; the one has more regard to the inward, the other to the outward, perils and delicacies of her situation : Viola proceeds more by consciousness, and fears to compromise herself to herself ; Rosalind proceeds more by observation, and fears to discover herself to others. In this view Rosalind's occasional freedoms of speech become the finest proofs of feminine delicacy ; being obviously intended as a part of her disguise, and bearing the same relation to her character as her dress bears to her person, and springing from an exquisite perception, that it were far less indelicate to perfect the disguise of her sex by going a little out of her character, than to hazard a suspicion of her sex by keeping strictly within her character. Such was Shakspeare's sensitiveness of mind, perceiving instinctively that the self-same acts, coming from different persons, would go to establish opposite conclusions, and opposite acts the same conclusions, respecting them. For while Viola could not indulge such freedoms of speech without violating her feelings of propriety ; in Rosalind, on the contrary, those very feelings counsel her to indulge them for the better concealing of herself. It must be confessed, however, that Rosalind plainly does not expect to be saved by mere verbal morality ; and that, as Mrs. Jameson says, she evidently attaches quite as much importance to things as to words ; female virtue and modesty not being with her altogether an affair of the ear and the tongue. Not accustomed to whitewash over impure thoughts and feelings with verbal fastidiousness, she therefore speaks as much more wantonly than she feels, as false modesty feels more wantonly than it speaks.

This play abounds in wild frolicsome graces which cannot be described ; which can only be seen and felt ; and which the hoarse voice of criticism scares away, as the crowing of the cocks is said to have frightened away the fairy spirits from their nocturnal pastimes. Of the mysterious power, at whose bidding nature springs up so fresh and bright about us, it were vain to speak : the secret of the magic glass is past our finding out ; and our proper business is, to accept its revelations without questioning how or whence they come. It seems, indeed, as if this poetical wizard had but to think of nature, and she forthwith came to him, to weave her gayest dance, and breathe her sweetest minstrelsy about him, as at once her child, her playmate, her lover, and her lord. And we know, that

“ Nature never did betray

The heart that loved her ; 'tis her privilege,
Though all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy : for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.”

LECTURE VIII.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE—MERCHANT OF VENICE—WINTER'S TALE.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE is among the least attractive, yet most instructive, of Shakspeare's plays. Surpassingly rich both in poetry and wisdom, it has, however, as Hazlitt hath remarked, "an original sin in the nature of the subject, which prevents our taking a cordial interest in it." This inherent sinfulness forbids me to dwell much on the events of the play. For political philosophy Blackstone himself might, and for aught I know may have gone to school to it with advantage; while for height of moral argument and religious heroism, it occupies perhaps the summit of human conception; the tone of sentiment and character developed by the events of the drama being as pure and lofty as those events themselves are repulsive.

The Duke of Vienna, a wise and merciful, but somewhat artful and intriguing prince, under pretence of going to travel, nobody knows ^{where} whither, deposes one Lord Angelo, a man of the highest professions and held in the greatest esteem, to administer the government during his absence. Instead, however, of going to travel, the duke disguises himself as a monk, and remains in the city; an unknown

" Looker on here in Vienna,
Where he doth see corruption boil and bubble,

Till it o'errun the stew : laws for all faults ;
 But faults so countenanced, that the strong statutes
 Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop,
 As much in mock as mark."

His purpose in this action is so very subtle and complex, that I know not how to convey it save in his own words, wherein he unfolds his wishes and designs to the principal of the religious house where he puts up.

DUKE. We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
 (The needful bits and curbs of headstrong steeds,) Which for these fourteen years we have let sleep;
 Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave,
 That goes not out to prey : Now, as fond fathers,
 Having bound up the threat'ning twigs of birch,
 Only to stick it in their children's sight,
 For terror, not to use ; in time the rod
 Becomes more mocked than feared : so our decrees,
 Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead ;
 And liberty plucks justice by the nose ;
 The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
 Goes all decorum.

FRIAR. It rested in your Grace
 To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleased :
 And it in you more dreadful would have seemed,
 Than in Lord Angelo.

DUKE. I do fear, too dreadful :
 Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
 'Twould be my tyranny to strike, and gall them
 For what I bid them do : For we bid this be done,
 When evil deeds have their permissive pass,
 And not the punishment. Therefore, indeed,
 I have on Angelo imposed the office ;
 Who may, in the ambush of my name, strike home,
 And yet my nature never in the sight,
 To do it slander : And to behold his sway,

I will, as 'twere a brother of your order,
 Visit both prince and people : therefore, pr'ythee,
 Supply me with the habit, and instruct me
 How I may formally in person bear me
 Like a true friar. More reasons for this action,
 At our more leisure shall I render you ;
 Only this one : *Lord Angelo is precise ;*
Stands at a guard with envy ; scarce confesses
That his blood flows, or that his appetite
Is more to bread than stone : Hence shall we see,
If power change purpose, what our seemers be."

Drest with the duke's love, and armed with power

" So to enforce or qualify the laws,
 As to his soul seems good,"

the deputy, fond of practising godliness in the streets and at the looking-glass, and glad of an opportunity to act the reformer, because under that character he can best gratify his ambition while indulging his malignity and pride, forthwith awakens the sleeping statutes, and lets them loose against the life of one Claudio. Information of which is immediately sent to Isabella, Claudio's sister, "in whose youth there is a prone and speechless dialect, such as moves men," and who, besides,

" Hath prosperous art
 When she will play with reason and discourse,
 And well she can persuade ;"

whereupon, leaving the convent where she is about enrolling herself among the holy sisterhood, she hastens to intercede with the deputy. Her intercession, however, though worthy of an angel's tongue, has no other effect upon his godly soul than to move in him the vilest lust ;

and, under a solemn promise of pardon, which he does not mean to keep, he immediately attempts to commit, in its blackest form, the very crime for which he has passed upon her brother's life. Thus it turns out, as the duke had suspected, and as Isabella afterwards describes him, that

“ This outward-sainted deputy,
Whose settled visage and deliberate word
Nips youth i' the head, and follies doth enmew,
As falcon doth the fowl,—is yet a devil ;
His filth within being cast, he would appear
A pond as deep as hell.”

His lordship, however, is suffered to go on until his guilt has fully matured itself, and he begins to exult in his success, when the duke, who has been secretly watching and thwarting all his movements, suddenly reveals himself and closes the deputation, with Lord Angelo effectually in his toils. To understand the play aright, it is proper to suppose, that his lordship, like other ambitious reformers, has long been cultivating popular arts, and, not content to *let* his light shine, has been trying hard to *make* it shine, affecting peculiar sanctity and severity of life, and perhaps murmuring against “the powers that be,” with a view to ingratiate himself with the multitude ; until the duke, better able to understand his motives than to persuade others of them, and knowing that one who so affects the honour of men by austerity of life, can hardly intend the honour of God thereby, wisely resolves to let him try his hand in the government. Of this, indeed, or something very like it, we have an intimation, where, when Lord Angelo pro-

poses that he be publicly escorted out of the city, he declines the honour, saying,

“ I’ll privily away : I love the people,
But do not like to stage me to their eyes :
Though it do well, I do not relish well
Their loud applause, and *aves* vehement ;
Nor do I think the man of safe discretion,
That does affect it.”

On the whole it is not easy to decide whether the duke be more wise in his reasons for suspecting the deputy, or more cunning in his plans for entrapping him.

ANGELO.

BISHOP BUTLER, in his sermon preached before the House of Lords on the anniversary of the murder of King Charles I., speaks of a class of hypocrites, who practice hypocrisy not only towards men, but towards God and their own consciencies ; and who, unwilling to think or believe any thing ill of their own characters, “ try appearances upon themselves as well as upon the world, and with at least as much success ; and choose to manage so as to make their own minds easy with their faults, which can scarce be done without management, rather than to mend them.” It is to this class of hypocrites, I take it, that Lord Angelo belongs. He is a puritan, in the true, original meaning and application of the term ; that is, a man with whom purity is not so much a virtue as an art, a matter not of conscience but of conceit ; one of those who fast their bodies only to feast

their pride, and therefore, instead of combing their hair and anointing their face with oil, that they may not appear unto men to fast, take care to do all their fasting in public, with a demure visage, a sanctified air, and a falsetto voice ; who, being justly given over to their own strong delusions and made to believe a lie, sincerely think that they are what they affect and appear to be ; who, in short, from mere ambition make the greatest professions of sanctity, and then from mere vanity conceive themselves saints. This false persuasion of their own virtue is a just punishment upon some men for their selfishness and self-sophistication ; for trusting their own hearts and using religion “for a cloak of maliciousness ;” for refusing to see any thing amiss in themselves or suffer any abatement of their pride. When such men *wish* to do any very shameful or wicked thing, they will of course from mere energy and earnestness of self-deceit persuade themselves that they are prompted thereto by extraordinary tenderness of conscience and zeal for the glory of God ; like the fanatic mentioned by Dr. South, “who murdered his own mother for kneeling at the sacrament, alleging that it was idolatry, and that his conscience told him it was his duty to destroy idolaters.” Accordingly, as we learn in the sequel, Lord Angelo, being espoused to a lady of great wealth and equal virtue, upon the loss of her fortune by shipwreck had no difficulty in persuading himself and publishing to the world, that her virtue was shipwrecked also, thus fattening his own reputation by sucking the life-blood out of hers ;—“left her in tears, and dried not one of them with his comfort ; swallowed his vows whole, pretending, in her discoveries of dishonour : in few, bestowed her on her

own lamentation, which she yet wears for his sake ; and he, a marble to her tears, is washed with them but relents not." The world is full of examples of this most subtle, malignant hypocrisy, this studied self-deceit ; men who, resolved to be at ease with themselves, to stand well in their own eyes, endeavour, not to see whether their conduct be right, but to find reasons to justify it to their own minds, and even conceive their faults to be but unappreciated virtues ; who will rather believe every thing against all others than any thing against themselves ; who stultify all the rest of mankind to strengthen the conceit of their own wisdom ; who, not being held perhaps in very high esteem, take refuge from self-distrust in the persuasion, that if St. Paul or a Greater than he were present, he would be as little esteemed and as hardly entreated as they are ; who even turn revelation into an evil, because, filled with self, they study it only to attribute their own opinions and interpretations to the Spirit, thereby, in effect, arming the deceitfulness of their own hearts with divine authority.

It is worthy of remark, that this conceit of purity, this puritanism often renders men inaccessible to certain temptations ; makes them literally too wicked, too proud, to commit certain sins ; puts them too much in love with themselves, too high in their own esteem, to be reached by the ordinary seductions of life : and because they are below certain vices, they therefore conceive themselves above them. For a man may love himself so much as to loathe and scorn the food that stirs the appetites of better men. " The devil's darling sin, is pride that apes humility ;" and a man absorbed in this sin is, strictly speaking, too impure to relish common impuri-

ties. All of which, it seems to me, is exemplified in Angelo; insomuch that none perhaps but Isabella, "a thing enskyed and sainted," who truly *is* all that he affects to be, could tempt him, because none other could come over his spiritual pride and conceit; and her presence with heaven's riches on her tongue, its beauty in her face, its purity in her heart, may be said to *elevate* him into lust. For a man like him must obviously become worse in appearance, before he will become really better; that is, he will never become virtuous, till he part with his conceit of virtue; and he will hardly part with that conceit, until some notorious vices, with the shames and sufferings consequent thereon, whip him out of it.

That Angelo believes himself to be what he seems; in other words, that he is the dupe of his own hypocrisy, is evident from his surprise at the effect Isabella's presence has upon him. Wrapped up in his devilish pride, he has supposed, and gloried in supposing himself above such passions; proof against all the allurements and infirmities of the flesh:—

"Ever till now,

When men were fond, he smiled, and wondered how."

Being fully persuaded of his own virtue; that is, "most ignorant of what he's most assured;" he is of course astonished and amazed at "the strong and swelling evil of his conception." As, however, he has hitherto been kept from evil, not by any virtue, but only by conceit of virtue; that is, kept from some vices by one much greater vice; so now, being confident of impunity, he chooses rather to give up his conceit than his

purpose : as the duke anticipated, power and place untie the devil within him ; his success in deceiving others has at last precluded the motives to deceive himself ; he has no longer any occasion to believe his own lies, now that he has so fully persuaded others to believe them ; and even if Isabella should proclaim him, as she threatens, he knows,

“ His unsoiled name, the austereness of his life,
His vouch against her, and his place i’ the state,
Will so her accusation overweigh,
That she shall stifle in her own report,
And smell of calumny.”

Such appears to me the character of Angelo ; a man of manifold hypocrisy, a model of a whited sepulchre ; and the duke seems to have felt that one so pure and pious outwardly, so proud and public in his virtues, must needs be full of rottenness within. And such is Shakspeare’s commentary on the guilt and folly of trusting our own hearts, as if he would show, that the heart is indeed deceitful above all things, yet nobody can know it, because in nothing does it so much deceive as in regard to its own deceitfulness.

ISABELLA.

ISABELLA, the heroine of this play, is among the finest, in some respects the very finest, of Shakspeare’s female characters. Called from the cloister, where she is on the eve of taking upon herself a vow of perpetual seclusion from the world, to plead for her brother with the deputy,

she comes forth a saintly anchoress, clad in all the sweet austere composes of womanhood, to throw the light of her virgin soul upon the dark, loathsome scenes and characters around her. With Helena's strength of intellect and depth of feeling she unites much more power of imagination, the whole being pervaded, quickened, and guided by a still, intense religious enthusiasm. All that she has, and hopes, and is, is dedicate to holiness. Disciplined to the strictness, the severity, and peacefulness of cloistral life, her deep feelings and noble faculties appear leagued in perpetual amity by the power of religious faith. In her earnest aspirations after heavenly grace, she rather wishes to increase than lessen the restraints of her intended vow ; having already built on her religious trust hopes equally brilliant as those of the most romantic imagination, and of course infinitely more enduring. Accordingly there is a vestal grandeur about her character, to which I know of nothing equal, save in the lives of some of the most distinguished saints. Yet, notwithstanding her angelic sanctity of soul ; as-soiled as her life appears of earthly encumbrances, her bosom, quick to the least touch of human suffering, responds to every call of pity ; her heart, her looks, her speech, are instinct with the eloquence of sympathy ; and she can at any time throw all the light that shines upon her out of heaven, round the tasks, the duties, and enjoyments of domestic life. How Shakspeare could depict a character thus answering alike to our household sympathies and our ideas of religious perfection ;—a character uniting the severities of the cloister with the affections of the fireside ; so full of sanctity, and sweetness, and tenderness ; so radiant, in short, with the

beauty of holiness and the gentleness of humanity,—may indeed seem strange to some ; yet such is the fact. That such a character must perforce defeat the schemes of the wicked deputy, need not be said. She is willing to lay down her life for her brother ; but the jewel of her sex's dower of course she will not yield up to save his life, or her own life, or both of their lives. The power and pathos with which she pleads for him are well known. The chaste eloquence, the severe beauty, the searching pertinency, are just what might be expected from such a mind enriched with the fruits of her habitual religious contemplation. Her deep strong feelings, once awakened from their nunlike repose, summoning to their aid all her intellectual energies and resources, gush forth in a purity, vigour, and aptness of style, such as cannot well be surpassed. Much of what she says has become domesticated wherever the English language is spoken, and would long since have grown old, were it possible by any means to crush the freshness of immortal youth out of it. The placing this creature of angelic whiteness, with a heart composed of nature's finest clay, and tempered with the choicest dewes of heaven, in immediate contact and contrast with such a breathing mass of pitch, brilliant from his very blackness, is one of those dramatic audacities wherein none perhaps but a Shakspeare could safely indulge.

THE DUKE.

THE character of the duke is almost as mysterious to us as his person, shrouded in a friar's habit, is to those

about him. So wise in speech, so crafty in act, we are not a little at loss what to make of him. His developing the characters of Angelo and Isabella abundantly pays us indeed for whatever perplexities he causes us : but we do not quite like his crooked, manœuvring, roundabout ways ; they savour more of the politician than of the statesman, and ill comport with his honour and dignity as a man, to say nothing of his station : in short, he exercises, to say the least, a freedom of means that seems hardly required by the circumstances, or justified by the event. But perhaps the hardest thing for us to pardon in him, is his soiling Isabella's hands, by engaging her against her better feelings and through the influence of his supposed order, in one of his intriguing schemes : I say her hands ; for her character he does not and cannot soil. In his disguise the duke acts, if any thing, rather more like a monk than a monk does like himself ; and we can hardly help thinking that the cowl and hood become him quite as well as the ducal robes : he enacts the character he has put on rather better of the two than the one he has put off ; and the skill with which he personates the confessor evinces greater practical familiarity with the breviary than with the scales and sceptre. His wisdom, however, and goodness as a man, pretty well atone for his failings as a prince. Some of his speeches, besides their poetry, contain more of fine morality than all Dr. Paley's works. The contrast between him and Angelo admirably teaches, how dangerous it is for spiritual pride to be dressed even with a little brief authority ; and how much more liberal is a genuine than a pretended virtue towards the vices of others.

This play abounds in the most violent contrasts and antipathies, whereby our feelings are continually crossed, our wishes thwarted; and of the catastrophe we can hardly help saying, "O, most lame and impotent conclusion!" Except the noble revelation of Isabella and her being called from the cloister to share the fortunes and honours of the duke, nothing turns out as we would have it; nor indeed are we greatly pleased that she should be diverted from the peaceful tasks and holy contemplations which she is so able and so worthy to enjoy. The drowsy justice, which we expect and wish to see gradually awakened and enthroned at the right hand of mercy, apparently relapses at last into a deeper sleep than ever. Angelo, whom we hate and detest, is merely disgraced, and then rewarded with the hand of a woman whom he has most shamefully abused, and whose only fault, is her inextinguishable love for him. Barnardine, a frightful petrification of humanity, who exults in his loathsome depravity under the very threatnings of the axe, is met by a reprieve, in the alleged hope of reforming him into fitness for death, when we feel quite sure he has not soul enough left to be reformed. Claudio, whom we wish to have soundly swung for trying to save his own life by plucking a star from heaven, and then honoured for his fidelity to the partner of his frailty, is left without either: and Lucio, the lively, but unprincipled jester and wag, who might well enough be treated as a privileged character, merely for telling some ridiculous lies about the duke is punished most severely of all.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

MERCHANT of Venice is universally accounted one of Shakspeare's most perfect works. Excepting his tragedies, it is probably read more than any other of his plays. From the days of Garrick till the present time, it has kept undisputed possession of the stage; its interest being as inexhaustible there as in the closet. Like *Measure for Measure*, without any tragic events it rises to the dignity of the most impassioned tragedy; unlike that, however, the subject is every way as happy as the execution is masterly.

Antonio, from whom the play takes its name, a generous-hearted, but melancholy gentleman, is introduced amid a circle of noble friends, who are bending all their energies in the cause of friendship. Among them, and dearer to him than all the rest, is one Bassanio, distinguished for his gifts and virtues, who, in the extravagance of youthful generosity, has lavished his fortune. Some miles distant resides a wealthy heiress, still more famed for gifts and virtues, "from whose eyes he hath sometimes received fair speechless messages," and "he has a mind presages him much thrift," had he but "the means to hold a rival place" among her princely suitors. Antonio's wealth and credit are immediately at his service. His money, however, being all embarked in ventures at sea, he is forced to try his credit with a rich miserly Jew, whom he has often insulted with opprobrious language, and, out of Christian liberality, disappointed of his avaricious hopes. The Jew, spying a possibility of revenge, but feigning a merry mood, con-

sents to furnish the sum required, on condition that Antonio sign a bond authorizing him, in case of forfeiture, to cut a pound of flesh from whatever part of his body he may choose. Which condition Antonio, of course deeming himself secure, from the very absurdity of the forfeit, readily complies with, and thus furnishes his kinsman for the amorous enterprise. Bassanio prosecutes his suit to the gifted heiress with entire success. Scarcely, however, has he recovered from his first transport of joy, when he receives intelligence that his benefactor's ventures at sea have all miscarried, and that the Jew, with most malignant seriousness, claims the forfeit of the bond. Leaving his bride the moment he has sworn the sweet oath, he hastens home, resolved to save his friend's life at the expense, if need be, of his own. No sooner has he left than Portia, his virgin wife, dispatches a messenger to the most learned lawyer in those parts for instructions, and, habiting herself like a doctor of laws, repairs to the trial. Bringing letters of introduction from her distinguished counsellor, whom sickness detains at home, she readily gets the management of the case into her own hands. To divert the Jew from his fiendish purpose, she taxes her genius, her wisdom, her persuasion, to the utmost; but in vain: scorning the spirit of justice, and deaf to the voice of mercy, both of which speak with heavenly eloquence from Portia's lips; rejecting thrice the amount of the bond, and standing immovable on the letter of the law, unrelenting, inexorable, imperturbable, he persists in exacting the bloody forfeit, and pushes his revenge to the very point of making the fatal incision, when Portia turns the letter of the law against him,

strips him of penalty, principal and all, and even subjects his life to the mercy of the duke. His life is granted him only on condition that he presently sign a deed of all he dies possessed, to his daughter, a Jewess only in name, who, loaded with her father's ducats and jewels, has lately eloped with another of Antonio's friends, and is staying at Portia's mansion during her absence. The play winds up with the hastening of all the parties, except the Jew, to Portia's residence. When all have met, Portia announces to Antonio the safe return of all his ships, supposed to be lost, and surprises the runaway lovers with the news of their good fortune. The affair of the rings, with the harmless perplexities it occasions, is but a contrivance for letting the mind down from the tragic height, to which it has been raised, to the merry conclusion which the play required.

Such are the leading events of the play, around which is gathered a profusion of the richest materials bathed in a flood of the richest poetry. Should I stop to dwell on all the striking beauties of particular scenes, I should scarcely have begun my remarks when I ought to have done. The love-intrigue of Lorenzo and Jessica, their escape, and their subsequent overflowings of conjugal affection, though unconnected with the main plot, save as a means of developing the Jew's character, form a fine romantic undertone accompaniment to the other parts, which is cheerfully welcomed to the place it occupies for the exquisite harmony it makes with them. The opening scene between the pensive merchant and his friends, discoursing of his ventures abroad, is among the noblest efforts of descriptive power to be met with in our poet's works. For the intense struggle of con-

flicting passions, the scene where Tubal one moment stuns old Shylock with the account of his runaway daughter's expenses, and the next revives him with the report of Antonio's losses at sea, is probably unrivalled in dramatic literature. Here we see revenge and avarice wrestling as in a war-embrace ; but, hope being on the side of revenge, of course avarice at last gives way. The trial-scene, with its tugging vicissitudes of passion, and its pantings of suspense, is hardly surpassed in tragic power anywhere ; and as it forms the catastrophe, so it concentrates the interest of the whole play. Equally inimitable in its kind is the night-scene between Lorenzo and Jessica, bathed as it is in love, and moonlight, and melody, with its anthology of classic gems, its ravishing lyric sweetness, and its apotheosis of music, followed by the grave moral reflections of Portia, as she approaches her home, and sees its lights, and listens to its sounds.

SHYLOCK.

SHYLOCK is one of those inconceivable masterpieces wherein the poet's skill is forgotten in the perfection of the work ; he seems so much a man of nature's making, that we can scarce accord to Shakspeare the merit of creating him. A true representative of his nation, of course his two absorbing passions, are love of money and hatred of Christians : both of which passions are the almost inevitable result of his origin and situation ; of a national pride which for ages never ceased to provoke hostility, but which no hostility could ever subdue ;

of a national thrift which never ceased to invite rapacity, but which no rapacity could ever exhaust ; and of a national weakness which, while it exposed them to wrong, only engendered the deeper hate, because it left them without the means or the hope of redress. Such is that wonderful people, whose nationality has survived the utmost dispersion, the fiercest persecution, the rise and fall of greatest empires ; a people whom no distance can separate, no proximity confound ; and who, a monument at once of heaven's favour and of heaven's justice, seem doomed forever to attest the truth of a dispensation whose benefits they are never to enjoy. And such is Shylock ; a type of national sufferings, of national sympathies, and national antipathies. Himself an object of bitter insult and scorn to those about him ; surrounded by enemies whom he is at once too proud to conciliate, and too weak to oppose ; he can have no life among them but money ; no hold on them but interest ; no feeling towards them but hate ; no indemnity out of them but revenge. Nothing he can do will purchase him any thing but obloquy and contempt ; no gush of humanity, no sacrifice of disinterestedness, will silence or soften the prejudices against his nation ; and of course the seeds of generosity originally implanted in his nature, instead of springing up into beauty and fragrance, have become congealed or petrified into malignity and selfishness. As the law acknowledges no such principle as equity towards him, so he will acknowledge none in his interpretation of it. Its spirit being avowedly his foe, he does not scruple to make its letter his friend. (It is not strange, therefore, that mercy speaks to him in vain ; he has long looked to others for mercy,

and has not found even justice ; and therefore when others look to him for mercy, he will not give even justice. The prophecies of Scripture against his nation have been turned into a patent for persecuting him ; therefore he turns the ancient prerogatives of his nation into a patent for cursing them ; and returns their Christian intolerance with Jewish obstinacy. The more they close their arms and doors against him, the faster he clings to his national faith ; his very language seems to have been circumcised, and to have gone to school to the synagogue. Such is the natural effect of intolerance upon helpless, defenceless pride ; producing the widest separation of feeling and character among those who are the nearest together in place.

But with these national peculiarities Shylock unites the deepest and strongest individuality ; thoroughly and intensely Jewish, he is not more a Jew than he is Shylock. Endowed with the finest gifts of nature, the wrongs he has suffered and the pride he has opposed to them, have dried all the sap of humanity out of him, but have left his noble intellect standing entire. With as much elasticity of mind as stiffness of neck, every step he takes, but the last, is as firm as the earth he treads upon ; every reason he advances is perfectly unanswerable, except in a single instance where he chooses to rely on the antiquities of his nation rather than on his own resources. Nothing can daunt, nothing can disconcert him ; remonstrance cannot move, ridicule cannot touch, obloquy cannot exasperate him : when he has not provoked them, he has been forced to bear them ; and now when he does provoke them, he is hardened against

them. In a word he may be outreasoned, he cannot be outwilled ; he may be broken, he cannot be bent.

“Bodies fall by wild sword law ;
But who would force the soul, tilts with a straw
Against a champion cased in adamant !”

In Shylock national sympathies and antipathies are so complicated with those of a personal kind that, though we recognize the presence of both, we cannot distinguish their respective influence in his action. Though most intensely individual, his life is altogether bound up in that of his tribe. Even his avarice has a smacking of patriotism : money is the only defence not only of himself but of his brethren ; and he craves it for their sake as much as for his own : he feels that wrongs are offered to them in him and to him in them ; and he seeks revenge for them as well as himself. Antonio has scorned his religion, thwarted him of usurious gains, insulted his person ; therefore he hates him as a Christian, himself a Jew ; hates him as a lender of money gratis, himself a griping usurer ; hates him as Antonio, himself Shylock. “He hath disgraced me, and hindered me of half a million ; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies ; and what’s his reason ? *I am a Jew.*” Moreover, as if to stimulate still further his enmity, who but a Christian, one of Antonio’s faith and fellowship, has stolen his daughter’s heart from him, and seduced her into revolt, freighted with his ducats and his precious, precious jewels ? “Why, thou loss upon loss ! the thief gone

with so much, and so much to find the thief; and no satisfaction, no revenge: nor no ill luck stirring, but what lights o' my shoulders; no sighs but o' my breathing; no tears but o' my shedding."—"The curse never fell upon our nation till now; I never felt it till now." Thus his religion, his patriotism, his avarice, his affection, all come in to reinforce and sanctify his personal hate; and if he can but catch his victim, if he can but get the law to his aid, will he, can he, should he relent? He needs no argument, will vouchsafe no reason for taking the pound of flesh, but that, "if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge;" a reason all the more satisfactory to him, for that he knows, that those to whom he gives it can neither allow it nor refute it: indeed, until they can rail or reason the seal from off his bond, all their railings and reasonings are but a foretaste of the revenge he seeks. In the immediate prospect of that morsel sweeter to him than all the luxuries of Italy, all his recent afflictions, the loss of his daughter, his ducats, his jewels, and even the precious ring with which he wedded his buried wife, have faded from his mind. In the intensity with which he thirsts for Antonio's blood, and the boldness with which he avows it; in the impassioned calmness, the cool, resolute, imperturbable malignity of his answers, "to cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there," and, "I stand here for law," there is something that makes the blood to tingle; it is the sublimity of malice! We feel, and tremble as we feel, that the yearnings of revenge have silenced all other cares and all other thoughts, and that his own heart leaps with fiendish joy, as he whets the knife for the heart of his amiable and unfortunate debtor. Fearful, however, as

he seems in his malignity, he comes not off without moving our pity. In the very act whereby he thinks to revenge his own and his brethren's wrongs, the national curse overtakes him : in standing up for the law, he has but strengthened his enemies' hands, sharpened their weapons against himself : having accumulated proofs of avarice only to manifest his energy of revenge, and having accumulated proofs of revenge only to evince his agony of disappointment, the terrible Jew sinks at last into the poor, pitiable, heart-broken Shylock. Truly, in all this Shakspeare has dived the depths of human nature, and opened a mine as full of instruction as of terror.

But, what, perhaps, is still more admirable, he does ample justice to Shylock, without doing any injustice to those about him. Himself superior to the persons and passions he is dealing with, while representing both parties as they appear to each other, he at the same time represents both as they are in themselves, and as they ought to appear to us ; so setting forth the characters with all their circumstances, all the earthly and unearthly influences around them, and so letting us into the why they are so and the how they became so, that the conduct of all seems perfectly consistent with human nature and the known principles of human action. The poet not only appreciates Shylock and enables us to appreciate him, but also knows and informs us why those about him do not and cannot appreciate him ; so that, if we be worthy, we may have the same charity for them as for him. / We can account for his conduct by the treatment he has received ; for that treatment by the force of national and religious prejudice ; and for such prejudice by the prejudices which I suspect we

can easily enough find in ourselves. It is true, we are more apt to remember what Shylock does than what he has suffered; and what he has suffered than what we ourselves perhaps in similar circumstances should inflict; but this is our fault, not the poet's. For such phenomena of human character, plain enough to us at a sufficient distance, become darker as they approach us, until they get into ourselves, where we cannot or will not see them at all.

The mercy extended to Shylock after he has fallen from his highwrought hopes of revenge, appears but little better than his revenge itself; for it is obviously resorted to as the only means of adding still further to his humiliation. His enemies turn from persecution to kindness, when kindness is itself the cruelest persecution, and readily grant him life, when they have rendered life a burden to him, and he, in the bitterness of despair, has prayed for death. Instead of treating him well, and thereby heaping coals of fire on his head, they appear to treat him well *in order* to heap coals of fire on his head: for the last resort of revenge, is, to mask itself in kindness, and it never bites so sharply as when opening its mouth in charity.

PORTIA.

SHYLOCK has undoubtedly more of character than all the other persons in the drama put together, and Portia has more than all the others except him. Mrs. Jameson, with Portia in her eye, intimates plainly enough, that she thinks Shakspeare about the only artist, except na-

ture, who could make women wise without turning them into men ; though probably far from the only one who could make men foolish without turning them into women. Portia is indeed a fine specimen of beautiful nature enhanced by beautiful art ; for it is hard to say, whether nature or art have done most for her. As intelligent as the strongest, she is yet as feminine as the weakest of her sex : she talks like a poet and a philosopher, and yet, strange to say, she talks, for all the world, just like a woman. As finely gifted and as highly cultivated as Helena, she is however much more self-contemplative ; indeed, from her condition she is obliged to live more in the intellect than in the affections, and therefore has not so entirely forgotten herself in external objects : from the first she has been a thinker rather than a lover, because she had neither the necessity of nature nor the force of circumstances to make her the latter, as Helena had. In a word, she is the most self-conscious of Shakspeare's heroines, yet her character is hardly the less lovely on that account ; and it is not a little surprising, that she should know her powers so well, and still think so modestly of herself ; that she should be so fully aware of her gifts, and yet bear them so meekly. She often talks of herself, yet always talks so becomingly, that we can hardly wish she should choose any other subject. Here is an instance, in what she says to the man whom she has chosen, when she sees he has chosen the casket which gives her to him.

“ You see me, lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am : though, for myself alone,
I would not be ambitious in my wish,
To wish myself much better ; yet, for you,

I would be trebled twenty times myself;
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
More rich;
That only to stand high on your account
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
Exceed account: but the full sum of me
Is sum of something; which, to term in gross,
Is an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised:
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, is, that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king.
Myself, and what is mine, to you, and yours
Is now converted: but now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself,
Are yours, my lord; I give them with this ring."

Knowing enough for any station, Portia nevertheless does not dream that she knows too much for the station which Providence hath assigned her; and she would neither hide her light under a bushel, that others may not see by it, nor perch it aloft in public, that others may see it, but would simply set it on a candlestick, that it may give light to all in her house. With her noble intellect she has cultivated the sweets of poetry and the solidities of philosophy, all for use, nothing for show; she has fairly domesticated them, has sweetly brought them into her sphere, and tamed them to fire-side service, instead of thrusting herself out of her sphere to display them; as if to make us feel,

“How charming is divine philosophy !
Not harsh, and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo’s lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns.”

In short, Portia has not set down in her catalogue of woman’s rights, that a woman has any right to be a man : truly worthy of that epithet, so noble yet so gentle, “an honorable wife,” she would be, as indeed she is, all the more a woman for that she has the strength, the dignity, and wisdom of a sage. Some of her remarks, especially those at the trial, are obviously premeditated ; for, as any other good lawyer would do, she of course prepares herself in the case beforehand ; moreover, being about to act a part, she would be foolish not to study it thoroughly in advance : but I should like to see the man that could premeditate any thing equal to them. Her consciousness of power has indeed inspired her with some degree of confidence, but not at all with vanity. Knowing Antonio’s danger, she disguises herself and hastens to the spot, not to exercise her skill, but merely to save the life of her husband’s friend and benefactor ; for with all her exquisite culture, humanity has not been so refined out of her, but that she can make an exception to the rule of her sex, in order to snatch a fellow being from death ; though she evidently feels and wishes her conduct in this instance to be an exception to that rule, and not that rule itself. And it should be remarked, withal, that the peace and honour of her husband are at stake, for whose sake Antonio became bound ; so that

her highest duties as a wife counsel her to the part she undertakes ; for she is resolved, that

“ Never shall he lie by Portia’s side
With an unquiet soul.”

That she should be slightly elated by her brilliant success, was necessary perhaps, to keep her within the pale of our human sympathies ; otherwise she would hardly appear a human being ; much less, a woman.

The affair of the caskets is obviously but a dramatic device, to save her from the princely suitors, whom she could not accept, for the noble Bassanio, whom she would not reject. In no other way, perhaps, could she be represented with propriety as the ambition of princes, and yet the willing prize of a mere gentleman. The device, moreover, serves to evince her deep filial piety, one of the noblest traits of human character ; that is, it was so considered in those ignorant times ; and as her choice falls in so perfectly with her destiny, we do not regret that her hand was left to the decision of fate. Besides, she is evidently queen over her affections, though not over herself ; if she cannot choose where she would, she can love where she should : for the same high sense of duty which holds her deep strong feelings in check, will also fix them in all their depth and strength where they justly belong. A rich atmosphere of poetry embraces us in the casket scenes, which more than compensates for the improbability of the device.—On the whole, if Portia strikes less to the natural and romantic within us than the poet’s other heroines, she probably makes up the account in striking more to the

rational and moral: without the native spontaneous grace and sweetness of some of them, she has, however, that which many good people may deem a full equivalent, namely, wisdom and skill,

“ So well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best.”

And perhaps the rest of this noble description may be not unfitly applied to her :—

“ Authority and reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally ; and, to consummate all,
Greatness of mind, and nobleness, their seat
Build in her loveliest, and create an awe
About her, as a guard angelic placed.”

Brought up amid the choicest riches and splendours earth can bestow ; with the very regalities of nature and art around her, and with the selectest influences of creation continually raying in upon her ; she is indeed “ a rich-souled creature,” in whom the finest germs of womanhood have blossomed forth without a weed to check or a chill to blight their growth.

ANTONIO AND HIS FRIENDS.

THE friendship between Antonio and his companions is one of those sweet pictures of disinterested attachment which Shakspeare evidently delighted to draw. Almost any one of this group of friends would do well

enough for the hero of any other author's masterpiece. It is true, they share deeply in the prevailing prejudices against the scattered children of the sacred nation, but in such a way as to seem rather the victims than the authors of those prejudices ; and if a man is to be condemned for not rising above the age in which he lives, it were surely hard to tell what is to be done with the most of us. Antonio is a noble unambitious merchant, who seems to covet wealth only as a means of gratifying his generosity ; and his friends obviously love him for what he is, not for what he has. His pensive, yet gentle warm-hearted sadness forms a fine contrast to the icy intellectuality of old Shylock, beautifully illustrative of the difference between the Christian and the Jewish religions. Of a most enlarged and liberal spirit ; affable, generous, and magnificent in his dispositions ; patient of trial, forgiving of wrong, indulgent to folly, profuse towards his friends, ingenuous towards his enemies ; moderate in prosperity, composed in adversity,—all these qualities, softened and sanctified by the tender pensive melancholy which has stolen over him, take captive our best and purest sympathies, and make his character one which we contemplate with ever new delight. So opposite to the snarling, biting, growling, greedy, griping spirit of Shylock, we can as little blame him for calling the Jew a dog, as we can blame the Jew for being a dog. Nothing can be more sweetly characteristic than his charge to Bassanio, when baring his bosom to the fatal knife :

“Commend me to your honourable wife :
Tell her the process of Antonio's end,

Say, how I loved you, speak me fair in death ;
And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge,
Whether Bassanio had not once a love."

Among Antonio's friends Gratiano is a remarkable instance of great strength and rectitude of mind united with incessant volubility. It is not a little strange, indeed, that one should be able to utter so much sense with such apparent rattle-tongued, scatter-brained thoughtlessness. As might be expected, his trotting volubility has hindered his reputation for wisdom, as the noisy speed of a waggon naturally argues its emptiness ; a circumstance which shows, that economy in the utterance of knowledge is sometimes necessary, to gain one the credit of possessing it. Bassanio assures us, that his friend "speaks an infinite deal of nothing more than any man in all Venice : His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff ; you shall seek all day ere you find them ; and, when you have them, they are not worth the search." But we are by no means inclined to agree with him : on the contrary, Gratiano seems to us no less witty and sensible than talkative. He has indeed renounced the hope of getting the reputation of wisdom by never saying any thing ; and he wisely makes a merit of talking nonsense when, as is often the case, nonsense is the best sort of sense. He neither has nor affects any fellowship for faces of marble : seeks not the society of cast-iron gentlemen ; and out of pure generosity, he is willing to incur the charge of folly, provided he can thereby add to the health and entertainment of his friends. His creed and practice are :—

"With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come ;
 And let my liver rather heat with wine,
 Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
 Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
 Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster ?
 Sleep when he wakes ? and creep into the jaundice
 By being peevish ? I'll tell thee what, Antonio,—
 I love thee, and it is my love that speaks ;—
 There are a sort of men whose visages
 Do cream and mantle, like a standing pond,
 And do a wilful stillness entertain,
 With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
 Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit ;
 As who should say, *I am Sir Oracle,*
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark !
 O, my Antonio, I do know of these,
 That therefore only are reputed wise,
 For saying nothing :—
 But fish not, with this melancholy bait,
 For this fool's gudgeon, this opinion."

In the character of Launcelot Gobbo, the "wit-snapper," a droll stream of humour runs through the play ; and his affection for Jessica runs like a thread of gold through his character. His debate with himself, whether he shall follow the fiend, who counsels him to run away from his master, the Jew, or follow his conscience, which counsels him to stay, is a strange piece of moral drollery. He thinks, "in his conscience, his conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer to counsel him to stay with the Jew ; the fiend gives the more friendly counsel ;" and we are rather inclined to think so too. His skill in verbal tactics and the "army of good words," which he "hath planted in his memory," afford an apt commentary on—

“The many fools, that stand in better place,
Garnished like him, that for a tricky word
Defy the matter;”

and show to admiration, how plentifully words may be packed in a head that contains nothing else.

WINTER'S TALE.

WINTER'S Tale outdoes all the rest of Shakspeare's fictions in disregard of the far-famed Unities of time and place. With geography and chronology he plays the wildest tricks imaginable; the freedom with which he has brought together distant times and places almost reminding one of fairy Puck who could “put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes.” Notwithstanding which, the play is pervaded with the strictest unity of interest and purpose; the violations of local and chronological order being forgotten in the far higher order which is everywhere preserved. Its true whereabouts is in the reader's mind, and it everywhere squares with the laws and jumps with the order of this whereabouts.

Leontes, king of Sicilia, and Polixenes, king of Bohemia, having spent their childhood together as constant playmates, came to regard each other with the confidence and affection of brothers; and, after ascending their respective thrones, found their greatest delight in each other's society. As ships could then pass between their two kingdoms without the slightest difficulty, of course they made frequent visits to one another. Both are blessed with noble wives and promising heirs; and

their love to each other is only less than to the partners and successors of their thrones. The play opens with the preparation of Polixenes to return home from a visit to his royal brother, and with the most pressing entreaties of the latter for a prolongation of his visit. His own efforts failing, he calls in the assistance of his queen, whose cordial and irresistible persuasions at last prevail upon Polixenes to stay another week. Loving and honouring him purely for her husband's sake, as she, acting the part of an obedient wife, has been the means of lengthening his stay, of course she feels bound in all honour and hospitality to spare no pains to make the stay agreeable to him; and she proceeds to entertain him with that freedom, and sweetness, and affability which she supposes, and cannot but suppose, will be most pleasing to her husband; whereupon his eyes begin to grow green, and he forthwith conceives an ungovernable jealousy. Transformed by jealousy into a tyrant, he immediately compels his oldest, wisest, and most trusted counsellor to engage, as cupbearer to his royal guest, to poison him; who, however, not being greatly in love with the doctrine and discipline of regicide, instead of spicing the cup, goes straight to Polixenes, informs him of the danger, and escapes along with him in perpetual self-exile. Upon their escape, the king overwhelms the queen with the most ignominious charges, confines her in prison, and dispatches an embassy to the Oracle of Delphi, to ascertain the validity of his suspicions. Meanwhile the queen in prison becomes the mother of a princess, whom the king immediately causes to be carried out of his dominions, and abandoned to chance on some foreign shore. Upon the

return of the ambassadors, the queen being brought to trial and pronounced innocent, the king forthwith impeaches the Oracle, and remands her to prison; whereupon intelligence is brought him, that his only son, the heir to his crown and idol of his heart, broken down by the dishonours heaped on his mother, is dead. At the hearing of this the queen falls, and the king, interpreting it as a judgment upon him for giving Apollo the lie, relents: he tries to recover the queen; but in vain; she has passed beyond the reach of his anger, or his love. Stung with anguish at his loss, and racked with remorse for his injustice, he devotes a part of every day of his coming life to bitter penance on the grave of his incomparable queen, and takes a vow of perpetual widowhood. The agents employed in removing the infant princess having all perished in a storm at sea, the king is left without an heir, and is assured by Apollo's Oracle, that he shall not have one till she be found. Having been left on the shore of Bohemia, she is taken up by a shepherd, and reared as his own daughter. The crown-prince of Bohemia, Florizell, son of Polixenes, accidentally falling in with her on one of his hunting excursions, stoops his heart and hand to her service. Of course he spends much of his time in hunting in that direction, and his much absence kindles very uneasy apprehensions at court. The king, hearing the fame of the lovely shepherdess, and "fearing the angle that plucks his son thither," determines to visit the place in disguise, where he detects the prince in the midst of his courtship, and orders him, under penalty of death, to leave her forever: but he, "more straining on, for plucking back," and preferring his faith before crown or even

life, immediately takes ship for Sicilia together with his supposed shepherdess and her supposed father. The king, his father, in 'hot pursuit arrives at Sicilia almost as soon as he ; when the shepherdess is found to be the daughter of Leontes ; and of course matters are all right again. Upon the recovery of the princess the king and court are assembled to behold a statue of the lost queen, which her most loving female friend has procured to be made, when to the inexpressible wonder and astonishment of the gazers, the queen herself comes down from the pedestal, and throws herself into the arms of her husband.

LEONTES.

UP to the supposed death of the queen, the interest of the play is altogether of the tragical kind. The insane jealousy of the king, the noble agony of the queen, the enthusiasm of the court in her defence, and the king's violence towards both them and her, are done off in Shakspeare's highest style, and give occasion for some splendid displays of poetry and pathos, of passion and character.—In Leontes the poet has delineated jealousy proper, in all its native hideousness, purely self-begotten, and fed by its own surmises. Accordingly, the passion appears in him without any assignable cause ; why it is there, how it got there, whence it came there, we know not, for the simple reason that the why, the how, and the whence, do not exist ; it is there, simply because it is there ; has no allegable grounds whatever, and would not be jealousy if it had : springs out of noth-

ing, makes its own evidence out of nothing, and, after gorging itself upon nothing, returns to its original elements. As it is altogether a matter of fantasy and will, groundless in its origin, fanatical in its nature ; so of course no facts, oaths, or arguments can at all prevail against it ; as the wise old Lord Camillo says :

“ You may as well
Forbid the sea for to obey the moon
As, or by oath, remove, or counsel, shake
The fabric of his folly ; whose foundation
Is piled upon his faith.”

Like other fanatics and lunatics, the king is of course tenacious and confident of his opinion in exact proportion as he lacks means whereby to justify it ; he substitutes his own suspicions for facts, his own surmises for proof ; is so absorbed in his own conception that he cannot or will not see any thing else ; in a word, he knows the thing because he knows it, because he will have it so, and will act as if it were so ; and his passion is all the more violent and cruel, forasmuch as there are no realities to support it, or limit it ; is as arbitrary and tyrannical in its measures, as it is fantastical in its origin ; so that the queen's life, as she herself remarks, “ stands in the level of his dreams.” Even his appeal to the Oracle is not to confirm himself, but merely for the satisfaction of others :

“ Though I am satisfied, and need no more
Than what I know, yet shall the Oracle
Give rest to the minds of others ; such as he,
Whose ignorant credulity will not
Come up to the truth.”

But the same fanaticism which supersedes facts, and is proof against reason, will of course reject all authority ; he will trust in the gods only on condition that they agree with him in opinion : so that nothing but some overwhelming calamity, acting on the same superstition that made him jealous, and so dividing it against itself, can scourge the jealousy out of him. Such is the true nature and working of jealousy ; and it is probably for these reasons, that, though the painfulest of human passions, it seldom excites any feeling but scorn or disgust ; can get no aid from sympathy ; and awakens not a single pulse of pity in others, even while racking with sleepless torment the breast that harbours it. Whether, or how far it existed in Leontes before, is left to our own inference : the avidity with which he lays hold of the first occasion to indulge it, proves that at least the rudiments of it were already there. Without any assignable origin, it is also without any perceptible progress ; self-begotten, it is born full grown. Its proper workings, its restlessness, wilfulness, distractedness ; its turnings, and twistings, and tuggings to find outward support, and, failing of this, to support itself ; its mixture of self-distrust and self-assurance, prompting it to foreclose deliberation by immediate action ; and its selfish, revengeful malignity, wishing for proofs of what it has conceived, and wreaking upon its object the pains it inflicts on itself ;—all these are given with frightful minuteness and truth. The very language seems to have caught the distemper of the character : crabbed, knotty, harsh, oblique, enigmatical, vague, full of violent jerks, and stops, and starts, and ending neither here nor there, it betrays at every turn the monster of the thought.

Jealousy, however, seems to have been Leontes' only fault; enough, it is true, to cover a multitude of virtues. But the burning self-reproach with which he remembers his injustice, and the inextinguishable devotion with which he cherishes the memory of his noble queen, as they finally satisfy her, ought doubtless to satisfy us. We can the better afford to forgive him, inasmuch as he does not forgive himself. His iron vigor of thought and speech, after his passion has cleared itself, and his deep full gushes of penitence after his bereavement, prove him to have both admirable and amiable qualities. Quick, impulsive, and headstrong, he neither sets nor admits any bounds to anger or to sorrow; condemns himself as violently as he does others; and will spend his life in atoning for an injury which he has inflicted in a moment of passion.

HERMIONE.

FOR beauty of person united with graceful simplicity and majestic repose of character, Hermione surpasses all the rest of Shakspeare's women. The whole figure is expressive of classic grace, is framed and finished in the highest style of classic art. As she acts the part of a statue in the play, so she has a statue-like calmness and firmness of soul. It is as if some masterpiece of ancient sculpture had warmed and quickened into life and motion from its fulness of beauty and expression. Appearing at first as the cheerful hostess of her husband's friend, and stooping from her queenlike elevation to the most winning affabilities, her deportment rises in

dignity as her sorrow deepens ; and her character seems to wax in strength and beauty, as afflictions thicken upon her, until she appears truly sublime. Even when enjoying the best she seems prepared to meet the worst, that human life can bring. With an equal sense of what is due to the king as her husband, and of what is due to herself as a woman, a wife, and a mother, she knows how to reconcile all these duties : she therefore resists without violence, and submits without weakness. The perfect order, and fitness, and proportion of all her thoughts, and actions, and sayings, is irresistible. Nothing can inflame, nothing can quench her feelings ; nothing can transport or repress them. Her demeanour evinces a most deep, intense feeling of the awful indignity put upon her, and a lofty self-respect that scorns alike to resent it and to succumb to it. Touched with noble anger, yet composed by nobler pride, in her resignation she exemplifies that, "they are the patient sorrows, that touch nearest," and shows, as well as says, that though "she is not prone to weeping, as her sex commonly are," yet she "has that honourable grief lodged there which burns more than tears drown." Perhaps her character is best reflected in the sentiments of the king's chief counsellors, whose bosoms seem struggling between loyalty to their anointed sovereign, and love to their "most sacred lady ;" and whose swords seem ready, but for awe of the crown, to leap from their scabbards, to revenge the insulted honour of their adored mistress. Notwithstanding the unspeakable outrage done to her, she never allows herself the least expression of anger, or impatience, or resentment ; the charge neither arouses her passions, as it would Paulina's, nor stuns her sensibilities, as in case

of Desdemona: like the sinking of lead in the ocean's bosom, it goes to the depths without ruffling the surface of her soul; and the hardest thing which she utters—though, coming from her, it conveys a fearfully ominous meaning—is, “my lord, I never wished to see you sorry; now, I trust, I shall.” Her expression to the weeping bystanders, when she is ordered off to prison;

“Do not weep, good fools;
There is no cause: when you shall know your mistress
Has deserved prison, then abound in tears,
As I come out;”—

is one of those perfectly decisive strokes of character, which are to be met with only in Shakspeare. It is this independent, self-supporting consciousness of rectitude and purity, which so exalts and consecrates her to our feelings, and which lends her such an air of steadfast, majestic repose. That her conscious innocence can thus sustain her against the world, abundantly assures us, that she would die a thousand deaths ere she would do the thing that she is charged with; and the awe with which this assurance inspires us effectually precludes all doubts and questions respecting her. Thus grasping the central feeling of our nature, she of course bears all our feelings along with her: in a word, she becomes an object of religious veneration; one for whom we would scorn to argue; we would fight the wretch that should dare to breathe against her honour. Assuredly a being who is so far from trifling with her duty, is not to be trifled with, with impunity. The firmness with which she persists for sixteen years in hiding her life from the king, notwithstanding his daily

penances upon her supposed tomb, is all in perfect keeping with her character. One so sure to step right is not easily won to retrace her steps. Besides, it were hard to say, whether the cruelty of the king's treatment would more hopelessly wound the affection, or its meanness more hopelessly alienate the respect, of such a woman. She is too highminded either outwardly to resent, or readily to forgive, such an *infinite* wrong : but when she does forgive, the pardon is as sincere and perfect as the penitence has been ; the breach that has been so long a-healing, is at length entirely healed ; and when she remarries herself to her husband, she clasps him as firmly and closely to her bosom as she ever had done. Indeed, it is because she must be his *altogether* or not at all, that she holds herself from him so long : for to be entire, ingenuous, and perfect, is an impulse of nature and a necessity of character with her. Moreover, with her "sensibility of principle" and her "chastity of honour," the reconciliation must begin there where the separation grew ; she can never be again his wife but as the mother of his child, nor the mother of his child but as his wife : as, without the offspring and representative of their former union, they cannot be reunited, so, in the presence and possession of her whose being expresses their unity, they cannot, must not be divided ; in a word, where they are father and mother, there they are and must be one.—Such is Hermione, in her "proud submission," her "dignified obedience," with her Roman firmness and integrity of soul, heroic in strength, heroic in gentleness. As if on purpose to intimate beforehand what she is, to start and set our notions right concern-

ing her, the king is represented in the very beginning of his jealous fit as saying to her :—

“ Three crabbed months had soured themselves to death,
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand,
And clap thyself my love ; then didst thou utter,
I am yours forever ;”

where we see, that such as is the queen, the wife, the mother, such she was before becoming either ; one who thinks long indeed before she speaks, but, when she speaks, the word is never to be unspoken. We can hardly call her sweet, or gentle, though she is both ; she is a *noble* woman ; one whom, even in her deepest sorrow, we scarcely *dare* to pity. Yet the man who, knowing what she is, can read her last speech in the trial with unwet eyes, is made of sterner or of softer stuff than I am.

PAULINA.

PAULINA is perhaps the noblest termagant that we have any portrait of. Without any of the queen's dignified calmness and reserve, she is alive to all the queen's beauty and greatness of character : with a head to understand, and a heart to reverence such a woman, she unites a temper to fight, a generosity to die for her. She knows very well the privileges of her sex, and, regardless alike of prudence and propriety, she does not scruple to use them to the uttermost. Furious, hot-tempered, headstrong, and reckless, in the full assurance that her ends are just she stops not to consider the fit-

ness of her means ; and thus does injury from her very willingness to suffer it. But, though we cannot help regretting her conduct, inasmuch as it tends to hinder where she means to help ; neither can we help respecting and honouring her for it, inasmuch as it obviously springs from the noblest impulses. If her fierceness in defence of her "dearest, sweetest mistress," somewhat resembles that of a lioness defending her whelps ; the readiness with which she pardons the relenting king, also evinces the magnanimity of that bravest and gentlest of beasts. Mrs. Jameson classes her, and justly enough no doubt, among those women, of whom she assures there are many in the world, who seem regardless of the feelings of those for whom they would sacrifice their life. As she lets loose her fury in behalf of one for whom she is ready at any moment to die, so she spares the king's feelings the moment she sees he has any. Loud, voluble, violent, and viraginous, with a tongue that seems sharper than a sword, and an eloquence that seems enough to raise a blister, she has, however, too much honour and good sense to use them without good cause, and at the same time too much generous impulsiveness not to use them at all hazards when she has good cause, Thus, when the king threatens to have her burned for her audacious scolding, she replies ;—

I care not ;
It is a heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burn in 't ;"—

a reply not more noble in itself than it is natural to her character in the circumstances.

FLORIZELL AND PERDITA.

THE second part of Winter's Tale introduces us to very different scenes and persons from those which make up the first. The lost princess, and heir-apparent of Bohemia, two of the noblest and loveliest beings that ever fancy conceived, occupy the centre of the picture, while around them are clustered rustic shepherds and shepherdesses, amid their pastimes and pursuits, the whole being enlivened by the tricks and humours of a merry pedler and pickpocket. The most romantic beauty and the most comic drollery are here blended together. For simple purity and sweetness the scene which unfolds the loves and characters of the prince and princess, is not surpassed by any thing in Shakespeare, and of course is not approached by any thing out of him. All that is enchanting in romance, lovely in innocence, elevated in feeling, sacred in faith, is here brought together, bathed in the colours of heaven. The poetry is the very innocence of love, embodied in the fragrance of flowers. Clad in immortal freshness, this scene is one of those things which we always welcome as we do the return of spring, and over which our feelings may renew their youth for ever: in brief, so long as nature breathes, and flowers bloom, and hearts love, they will do it in the spirit of what is here expressed.

Perdita is a fine illustration of native intelligence as distinguished from artificial acquirements, and of inborn dignity bursting through all the disadvantages of the humblest station. Schlegel somewhere says, "Shakespeare is particularly fond of showing the superiority of the innate over the acquired;" but he has nowhere

done it more beautifully or more powerfully than in this unfledged angel.

“The prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the green-sward, nothing she does or seems
But smacks of something greater than herself.”

Just as much a queen as if she were brought up at court, and just as much a shepherdess as if she were born a shepherd's daughter, the graces of the princely and the simplicities of the pastoral character seem striving which shall express her loveliest. She is not a poetical being; she is poetry itself; and every thing lends or borrows beauty at her touch. A playmate of the flowers, when we see them together, we can hardly tell whether they take more inspiration from her, or she takes more from them; and while she becomes the sweetest of poets in making nosegays, the nosegays in her hands become the richest of crowns. Courted by the prince in disguise at one of their rustic festivals, herself the mistress of the feast, she transforms the place into a paradise.

“What she does,
Still betters what is done. When she speaks,
He'd have her do it ever: when she sings,
He'd have her buy and sell so; so give alms;
Pray so; and for the ordering her affairs,
To sing them too: When she doth dance, he'd have her
A wave o' the sea, that she might ever do
Nothing but that; move still, still so, and own
No other function.”

With the same delicacy and chastity of honour as her mother, she has less sternness and severity of carriage;

the discipline of circumstances having left unchecked and unsubdued in her the freshness, the simplicity, and playfulness of nature : yet, though her whole being is redolent of the scenes she has lived amidst,

“ We cannot say, ’tis pity
She lacks instructions : for she seems a mistress
To most that teach.”

With her mother’s depth, intensity and calmness of feeling, no perturbations can reach her ; and when a cloud comes over the innocent brightness of her love :—

“ This dream of mine,—
Being now awake, I’ll queen it no inch further,
But milk my ewes and weep.”

Of course no man were worthy of such a being, unless he were willing to give up all the rest of the world for her ; and the prince shows himself abundantly worthy of her in the sacrifices he makes, and the dangers he confronts for her sake. As, prizing his love before the crown, he quiets her forebodings with the words,—

“ Or I ’ll be thine, my fair,
Or not my father’s : for I cannot be
Mine own, nor any thing to any, if
I be not thine : to this I am most constant,
Though destiny say, no ;”

so prizing truth and honour above all things, he more than makes good his words by deeds :—

“ Not for Bohemia, nor the pomp that may
Be thereat gleaned ; for all the sun sees, or

The close earth wombs, or the profound seas hide
In unknown fathoms, will he break his oath
To this his fair beloved."

Indeed, Florizell is every way the peer of Perdita: none but the best of men could have felt the perfections of such a woman; none but the best of women could have won the heart of such a man; and if nothing can disturb the serenity of her love, nothing can subdue the strength of his. Alive and glowing with the fire of noble passions, himself the very sum and abstract of true manliness, of honour, purity, intelligence, and dignity, he seems at once the flower of princes, and the prince of gentlemen; and his love is truly "the Promethean spark stolen from heaven, to give a godlike soul to man." It was only by being forced to renounce his princely inheritance and brave the threats of his father, that Florizell could show himself worthy of such a woman; and it was only by growing up a perfect queen amid purely pastoral influences, that Perdita could show herself worthy of such a man. With so much skill does Shakspeare arrange his plots for the proper development and manifestation of his characters.

CAMILLO.

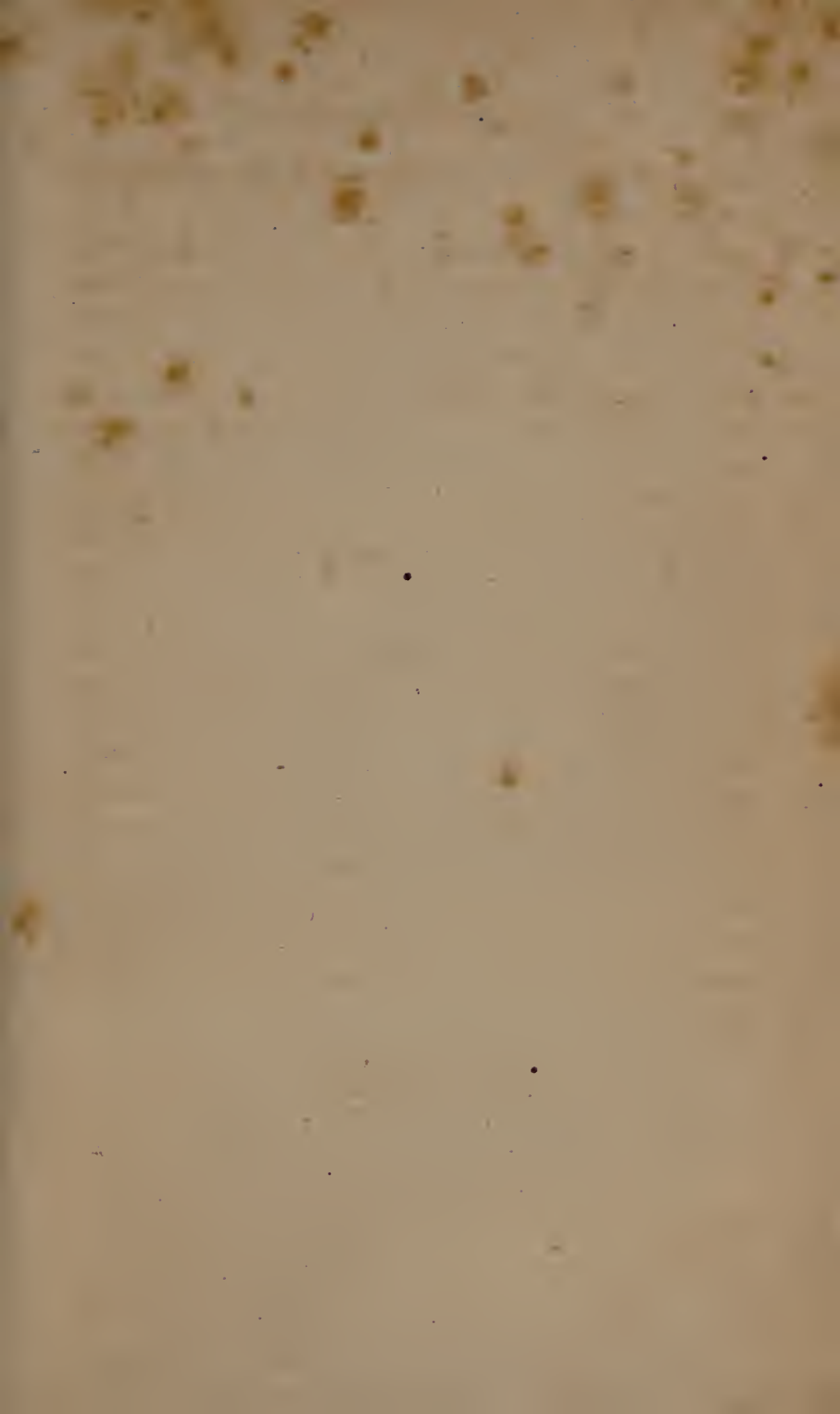
THE honest, upright, yet deceiving old lord, Camillo, is at once a venerable and an amusing character. His conduct must be a poser to rigid, formal moralists; those who are so very scrupulous that they will sacrifice the spirit of morality to the letter, and who are so awfully

conscientious, that they will have justice done, not only if the heavens fall, but even in order to make them fall. Uniting the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove, Camillo never deceives but when honesty requires it; and then he deceives to perfection; for perfect innocence is really the cunningest thing in the world: he tries to do good or prevent evil by telling the truth, till he sees there is no hope, and then he effects his purpose by telling downright falsehoods: in a word, he abounds in a sort of holy lies, as if he were willing to be lost himself, provided he may thereby save others. Thus, when he finds that the king, his master, "in rebellion with himself, will have all that are his, so too;" that it is utterly impossible to shake the fabric of his folly; and that the only way to defeat his purpose against the life of Polixenes is by seeming to fall in with it, he agrees at once to be the minister of it, then, "commending himself to the certain hazard of all uncertainties," unclasps the practice to the intended victim, and sacrifices all he has or hopes to save his life. The part Camillo plays in the drama, finely illustrates the principle of compensation which the poet often employs, thereby making up to a character in some things whatever may be wanting in others. Thus Camillo, though but an instrument in the development of the plot, is honoured with the highest trust and reverence of both the kings in succession. A mere staff in the drama, he is yet a pillar of state; his integrity and wisdom making him a light to the councils and a guide to the footsteps of the greatest around him. Fit to be the stay of princes, he is one of those venerable relics of the past, which show us how beautiful age can be, and which, linking together different generations,

form at once the salt of society and the strength of government.

Autolycus is the most amiable and ingenuous thieving rogue we shall anywhere find. The very gods seem to prosper his thefts as a reward of his wit. He evidently has "a divine idea" of stealing ; the sight, or smell, or suspicion of money, transforms him into an artist ; and he cheats almost as divinely as those about him love. In cuteness, he outyankees the Yankees altogether. It is as if Mercury himself had turned pedler and pickpocket ! If Apollo ever touched the lute with such lightness and subtilty of finger, no wonder his music brought down the house.

For stage effect, this play generally, and particularly the last scene with the painted statue, is said to be scarce anywhere surpassed ; a thing which I can readily conceive to be true. One would think the remarks of the spectators, as they stand gazing on the supposed statue, almost enough to awaken stone itself into life. We almost fancy them turning into marble, as they fancy the marble turning into flesh ; their intensity of amusement and admiration seems petrifying them into statues, while the statue seems stealing the life out of them to animate itself.



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